DSMP COMICS
VOL. 1
ESSEMPI
SCRAMBLED E.C.C.

Cover art by Pidgedee

For several years now, the DSMP fandom has been a bottomless well of passion, imagination, and creativity. This zine is a love letter to those qualities, and more specifically, the fandom's love for superhero stories. To all of you who write, draw, and create: we thank you for the inspiration, and dedicate this zine to you.

A special thanks goes out to our hardworking contributors, for whom this zine would not have existed without. Thank you for participating in this wonderful, collaborative work of art, and for making it something truly special.

~ DSMP Comics

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POWER
SWAP
ISSUE
#1
Creator: Hispanicin
1

A Few E.G.G.s Short of the Full Scramble

Author: definitelynotshouting

CW: Burns/Minor Injuries

No matter how used to this city's bullshit he is, sometimes Essempi still manages to throw him curveballs.

"Get back here, you fu– you *fucking pussy!"*

Tommy's haggard shout draws multiple heads; it's a busy, blocked off street, packed to the brim with civilians. That's Tuesday, for you; this flea market in particular attracts big crowds for the low, low price of– well, low prices. Nowhere else in Essempi regularly sells furniture this cheap, which is why he and Wilbur are here in the first place– you can only use a cardboard box for a chair so many times before it collapses beneath you. And while *Wilbur* might tolerate that shit, Tommy has *standards*– which brings him here: feet pounding against the pavement, dodging around elbows and massive bags, in hot pursuit of–

"Let go of my *fucking* wallet!"

– a cat.

"It's not even *your* wallet–" Wilbur's voice is winded behind him; unlike Tommy, he's got built in disadvantages that make dodging pedestrians perilous. Tommy glances back just in time for him to run smack into a lady carrying a stack of terracotta flower pots. It happens in slow motion: the woman reels back, the pots tumble from her hands, and as one they all shatter in a symphonic cacophony that explodes Tommy's eardrums. He sucks in a sharp breath through his teeth. Well, at least they weren't expensive?

Wilbur stumbles; it's only Tommy doubling back that keeps him from face planting into the shards. This is old hat for them– Wilbur doesn't bother with a *thank you* as Tommy hauls him up past the subsequent shouting, one hand gripping tight above his elbow. While they can't do much against Wilbur's self-destructive powers, Tommy can at least mitigate *some* of the damage.

"It's basically my wallet," Tommy argues as they duck beneath a stranger's outstretched hand, "since it has *my money* inside it too, you fucking prick, I *told* you to let me hold it!"

Unlike Wilbur, cats don't have the sort of handicaps that make navigating a crowd so risky for them– this one weaves between legs and display stands like a fish following the current, Wilbur's slim wallet clutched tight in its mouth. Tommy squints as it winds around a bin, tracking it through gaps in the horde; those markings, that tuft of hair between its ears…

Yep, it's him. Antfrost: petty thief, cat burglar, all-around fucking nuisance. Tommy swears under his breath; just their luck to get waylaid by a villain on their day off. They aren't even in *costume*.

"Can't you just–" Wilbur wheezes as they race for a gap in the throng– "tell it to come back? Bribe it with your powers, or something?"

"No," Tommy says with disgust, "because he's not a *real* cat– that's fucking *Antfrost*, and I'm going to kill him."

While the stalls they'd been perusing at the end of the market had been full of furniture and knick knacks, the ones they pass now are the more organic variety; fresh produce, local honey (and where they're keeping bees in this shithole is anyone's guess), and sweets that would, at any other point, make Tommy's mouth water. Discarded wrappers and crumbs

litter the ground here; Tommy dances around an abandoned bag of kettle corn lying in sad, crushed pieces on the ground, steps deft, eyes never leaving their target–

– and rams hip-first *directly* into someone's cookie display.

The world jolts, tilts on its axis; with a startled yelp, Tommy tumbles to the ground, pulling Wilbur down with him by force of sheer momentum. His chin connects against asphalt in an ugly, scraping line that burns as he skids– and that's *definitely* going to leave a mark, holy shit. Beside him, Wilbur lands with a punched-out *oof,* one elbow knocking against Tommy's ribs for good measure.

Dazed, Tommy glances up just in time for the table to wobble once, twice, before unceremoniously collapsing on top of them.

"Fuck!" Tommy shouts, rolling to the side. He brings Wilbur with him, scrabbling forward on hands and knees as the entire display falls right on top of the space they'd just occupied, cookies of all shapes and sizes rolling to the ground with a tumultuous, mind-numbing clatter.

For a moment, everything freezes, suspended in time with perfect, crystalline clarity.

Then the woman in charge of the stand leaps from her chair with a roar of abject rage.

"Tommy, go," Wilbur urges him, "I think we need to go. Tommy, go, *go–!"*

Far ahead in the distance, Antfrost slips lithely around someone's ankle and into the dark recesses of an alley entrance.

"Oh, *no* you don't, you fuckin' bastard." Tommy scrambles to his feet, fingers catching against the crinkled saran wrap of several cookies. Almost as an afterthought, he tucks one into his pocket– peanut butter, if the hand-written label is anything to go by. Then, directed to the red-faced, fuming woman: "Shit, shit, shit– sorry! Sorry!"

And quick as a rabbit, Tommy's launching himself back into the chase.

"Did you just *steal* that cookie?" Wilbur's startled question punches out from behind him; when Tommy darts him a quick look, his mouth is stretched in a thin, wide line, brows scrunched together– as if it's taking every ounce of willpower not to burst into howling laughter right here and now.

"It's compensation for the absolute *shit* day we're having," Tommy snaps, weaving around a garbage bin and dodging another elbow in rapid succession. "And don't ask me for any, Wil, I'm serious– this is completely *your fault* we lost our wallet to a *cat burglar."*

"*My* wallet," Wilbur corrects helplessly, but doesn't argue further.

Before long, the crowd thins out– they've reached the very edge of the flea market, where most of the foot traffic involves either coming or going. Tommy skids to a halt in front of the alley entrance; its mouth is a shadowed, gaping hole, rimmed with crushed dandelions growing from cracks in the pavement. Tommy eyes it critically; he hasn't been in this area much before, but its reputation for winding mazes stands clear in his mind. It's a smart choice, and if this is Ant's home turf, they need to catch him now before he escapes their reach.

He's preparing to leap forward when something snags the collar of his shirt, reeling him right back. Tommy gags, arms pinwheeling– only for Wilbur's hand to land on his shoulder, steadying him.

“Wait, wait, wait–” Wilbur pants. “Hang on a second, Tommy.”

“Wil, he’s getting away!”

“I know, I know!” Wilbur releases his shirt, wipes the sweat off his brow, then braces himself against the grimy brick wall. He paints a sore sight: stained jeans, ripped jacket, patches of grit stuck to his cheek. “But if I go with you–” he pauses, sucks in a harsh, rasping breath– “if I go, it’ll take twice as long. You– we need to split up. You go through the alley, I’ll meet you on the other side. Deal?”

Tommy stares at him. “You’re kidding. You’re gonna take the long way around?”

“You know my power will screw us both the first chance it gets.” Wil shoots him a wry smile through the tangled fringes of his hair. “It’ll take the same amount of time to go around as it would if I went with you. Trust me, I know how this works.”

Fuck. “Fuck,” Tommy says, kicking at an innocent can lying on the sidewalk. It clatters into the mouth of the alley, shadows swarming to swallow it whole. “Fucking– shit, alright, I’ll try and find him. But you'd better be there in time to back me up, okay?"

“I’ll do my best. Now get going, Tommy.”

Tommy manages one step forward before turning back to Wilbur, eyes narrowing. He pokes a finger into Wil's chest. “If you aren’t there when I catch him,” he says, with all the measured solemnity of a religious vow, “I swear to you, Wilbur, I will pack so much TNT into your Minecraft base that it explodes all the way down to bedrock.”

Then he pivots on his heel and barrels into the alley, the echoes of Wilbur's indignant shout reverberating in his ears.

The inside is a maze of old brick and cracking mortar, brimming with trash and detritus. Tommy turns the corner and bounds over an old cardboard box, feet slamming heel-first back into the ground. Lucky he’s wearing his good trainers, the ones he uses for his costume– the ground is damp with collective rot. He needs all the damn traction he can get.

Left, right, another left. Next fork in the path, pounding past a filthy cluster of shredded garbage bags and two pigeons pecking around them. Sunlight slants in odd places, casting half-shadows so deep he can’t peer through them. More than once, he takes a random turn only to slide to a stop in front of a dead end. After the third left that ends in a brick wall, Tommy swears, sulfurous and out of breath. Vigilantism brings with it a necessary boost to stamina, but running at a sprint takes a lot of energy; this just isn’t sustainable. Every second he wastes is another second Antfrost gets farther away from him.

What would Wil do, he asks himself as he backtracks at a jog, shoulders tense and jaw clenched tight enough to grind his molars. Sweat gathers in his palms, making them clammy. Wil’s smart, is the thing. A regular rules lawyer when it comes to his powers. He’d have an idea. C’mon, think, think…

It’s a shame his powers don’t extend to tracking animals. Tommy grimaces to himself– then blinks. Hadn’t he just–?

He's darting back the way he came in an instant, eyes trained on the piles of trash to light his way– there's the crumpled aluminum can he almost stumbled over; that's the tattered plastic bag hanging off a piece of plywood propped against the wall. Tommy takes a right and rounds the corner, heart pounding a war-drum beat in his teeth, and *yes*– there are the bags of trash once more, with both pigeons still pecking at a scrap of sandwich bread between them.

"Hey, guys," Tommy says, stopping a respectful distance away to lean his shoulder against the wall. "You haven't seen a fuckin'– a *cat* 'round here, have you?"

Both pigeons' necks snap up, heads cocked and eyes pinning as they examine the human standing in front of them. A long, startled beat of silence stretches through the air.

Then one of the pigeons rears back, wings flaring as if to take flight. "A cat? *Where?* Where's the cat?"

"No, no, I mean–" Tommy starts to throw a hand up in an aborted move to stop it, and instead freezes in place. "Not– I'm asking *you* if you've seen a cat. Uh– one of those Siamese cats, innit? With a wallet in its mouth?"

"Wait, there's a *cat?"* the other pigeon cries, swiveling its head with frantic motions. "Nearby?"

"No, mate, that's what I'm *asking*," Tommy says, exasperated. "Have you seen one?"

"You *never* see a cat coming!" The first one's feathers ruffle up, giving it the appearance of an anxious, feathery ball with legs. "They *eat* birds!"

"We have to go!"

"Oh *no*," the first pigeon wails. "But the *bread*–"

"No time for bread, there's a *cat* around!"

"Uh, guys–" Tommy tries.

"A *cat!"* the second pigeon reiterates. It gathers itself up, wings sweeping wide. "We need to leave immediately."

"Wait, wait, wait–!"

In a flurry of desperate flaps, both pigeons explode into the sky. Within moments, they're nothing more than specks in the distance– only a single feather drifts down to mark their wake.

Tommy watches them go, dumbfounded. "Fucking *pigeons*," he sighs at last, scrubbing one hand over his face. His fingers catch on the scrape over his chin, stinging the grit embedded in it. Prime above. *Dumbest birds on the planet.*

From the corner of his eye, something moves inside one of the garbage bags. Tommy doesn't even have a chance to tense before a dark muzzle pokes out of the plastic, followed by fluffy ears and intelligent eyes, watching him with undisguised curiosity. A raccoon; held in one black paw is a strip of half-moldy bacon, ringed with clear nibble marks.

“*Please* say you’ve seen a cat run past here with a wallet,” Tommy begs it.

“I’ve seen a cat run past here with a wallet,” the raccoon repeats, tilting its head. Its eyes glitter, sharp beads in a round face.

Tommy glares at it. “You’re just saying that, aren't you?”

“Well, you told me to,” the raccoon points out, shuffling out of the bag on three paws. One ear flicks; its head tilts the other way. “Is that a cookie?”

Tommy glances down at his jeans, where the peanut butter cookie he’d snagged earlier has slid halfway out of his front pocket. Its shape has been squished and distorted, but it's still recognizable; and slowly, an idea begins churning to life in Tommy's mind.

What would Wil do? he thinks, lips twitching. Apparently, the answer is this: *bribe a raccoon*.

“Yeah, it is, actually,” Tommy says, casual as anything. With careful motions, he pulls the cookie out of his pocket, tossing it up into the air before catching it to hold out for inspection. “You seem like you've got a real good sniffer there on your face. You wouldn’t happen to know where that cat went if I gave this to you, would you, king?”

The raccoon's ears sweep forward. "I might," it hedges, leaning forward.

Tommy waves the cookie meaningfully. “It’s peanut butter,” he coaxes.

The raccoon's eyes light up. “Yeah, okay, that’s pretty good,” it admits, dropping the moldy bacon and stepping forward. Both front paws reach out in a grabby motion. “Give it here and I'll show you where it went.”

"Oh, no, no, no, my friend," Tommy says, whipping it back out of reach. "You show me first, *then* I'll give this to you."

The raccoon's muzzle wrinkles, displaying two rows of gleaming teeth. "That's stingy."

"More like smart. I know how you raccoon types work."

Its eyes narrow, but it doesn't argue with him. "... What about half now, half later?"

Tommy's lips spread in an answering grin. "Sounds like you've got yourself a deal."

The cookie is soft, gooey, and clearly homemade as he pulls it out of the wrapper and tears it in two– he hands half of it to his improvised guide with a pang of regret tickling his stomach. Instead of eating it, though, the raccoon slinks back into the shadows, tucking its half behind one of the garbage bags and patting the plastic for good measure. Then it lopes back to Tommy's side, nose twitching.

“You got a name, big guy?” Tommy asks as it lowers its muzzle to sniff along the ground.

“You wouldn’t be able to pronounce it,” the raccoon replies without looking up. It snuffles the concrete for another long moment before raising its head once more. “This way,” it says, and breaks into a run.

Together, they weave further into the maze, pausing every so often for his guide to reaffirm the trail and continue forward. Tommy’s pulse picks back up, thrumming in his throat– if

they’re lucky (and without Wil around, the chances of that go up significantly), Antfrost will be too busy gloating over his prize to guess anyone might still be on his tail.

Another turn, pounding hard against the pavement, right on the heels of his raccoon– and the alley explodes into brilliant light. They've emerged into an abandoned side street, draped in the peeling remnants of old paint, backdoors hanging from their hinges. Its sole occupant is a familiar lanky figure, sitting at the top of a set of stairs leading to the back of some condemned building, rummaging gleefully through Wilbur's slim wallet.

Tommy doesn't hesitate. “Get fucked, bitch!” he shouts as he leaps from the alley’s mouth, propelling himself forward on spite alone. Antfrost's head snaps up from his prize, eyes wild, just in time for Tommy's knee to connect with his chin.

They both go down in a graceless tumble. It’s bad form; Tommy’s too adept at hand to hand combat to play this fast and loose with a known criminal. But today was supposed to be his *off day*– so sue him, he’s frustrated. The kick he aims at Antfrost's guts sings with prejudice, connecting with a solid *thunk* as they tangle on the ground, rough and uncoordinated.

Antfrost screeches, flinching back– and that’s all the opening Tommy needs. With a quick twist, he wrenches himself to the side and wraps an arm around Ant’s neck, pinning him with a neat headlock. “Wallet,” Tommy snaps, chest heaving. “Now.”

“Who even are you!” Antfrost squeaks, voice a punched-out gasp. Blunt nails scrabble at Tommy's arm. “Dude, holy *shit–”*

“None of your fucking business,” Tommy snaps, tightening the band around Antfrost's neck. "Just give me back the wallet."

"Oh my god, okay!" Antfrost's fingers jerk back like an electric shock. "Let me go, I'll–"

– and without warning, all Tommy's molecules rearrange. It's as if his entire body has ionized; his vision blurs, splits into a mirror, pins and needles crawling along his limbs. The sputter-burn of atoms shifting tears right through him, wrapping wire around his neck– Tommy chokes on it, unable to make a sound.

In front of him, Antfrost stiffens, spine going ramrod straight. And just like that, it's over– the static recedes, leaving both of them glassy-eyed and panting in short, sharp gasps.

“What the *fuck* was that?” Tommy manages to spit once his tongue regains some feeling.

As if in direct response, Antfrost's body bursts into flames.

Tommy *shrieks*, dropping his arm in favor of fumbling away from the conflagration– but he's not quite fast enough to avoid Ant's panicked flail. One desperate, burning hand latches onto his wrist; stars scurry across his vision as his skin reddens and blisters, bubbling heat searing through it. With another high-pitched yelp, Tommy sets one foot firmly against Ant's back and *shoves*.

Antfrost goes flying, grip broken; Tommy falls back with a *thump*. Rough concrete scrapes his palms as he scrabbles backward, eyes trained on the burning, twisting pyre in front of him.

For one heart-stopping moment, he's convinced he's about to watch a man die.

But Ant pauses mid-thrash. Tommy can just make out his eyes behind the flames; they stare, puzzled, at one blazing arm, turning it this way and that. For a second, the motion's meaning doesn't connect– then the pieces fall together, and Tommy's eyes widen.

Antfrost isn't burning.

"What the fuck," Tommy whispers once again.

Ant's gaping too. "Oh– oh shit," he says, dismay sharp between the syllables. "This– wait, it wasn't supposed to be like this."

"Like what?" Tommy bleats from his place on the ground. His wrist throbs, waves of vicious sparks wreathing his arm. "The hell did you just do?"

Antfrost's shoulders tense; the open shock on his face shutters, leaving behind an eerie, blank canvas. "... Nothing," he says slowly, eyes trailing over to where Tommy sprawls on the concrete. "Well– nothing you're gonna be around to worry about, that is."

Uh-oh. Tommy paws his way backward, eyes round. "Now hang on, hang– you're just a petty criminal, man, you don't need to kill me–"

"Yeah, but you're Red Raccoon, aren't you?" Ant says grimly, advancing with steady steps as Tommy struggles to get his feet back under him. "Hey, don't look at me like that– you've got a pretty distinct voice. Sorry. At least it's nothing personal– we just really can't risk you running into places you don't belong around here." A contemplative pause. "Okay, maybe it is a little personal. You did kick me, like, twice."

"After you stole Wil's fucking wallet, you prick–!"

"Tommy?"

The familiar voice that rings out from behind him sends a wave of relief shuddering through Tommy's chest. Both their heads turn at once; Wilbur is standing at the end of the street, hair plastered to his forehead and eyes glittering like chips of ice. Tommy seizes the distraction with both hands; he scrambles upright, ignoring the burn of his wrist, and stumbles towards Wil. If he's lucky, it's only a first degree– he's not sticking around to find out what a third degree one feels like.

"Tommy, are you alright–" Wil continues, then falters, zeroing in on Antfrost's best attempt to emulate kindling.

"Uh," Wilbur says.

Ant's eyes flick between them in rapid succession, then he groans. "Okay, yeah, villain monologue canceled," he says. Then, with a dirty glance thrown at Tommy's feet, he turns on his heel and bolts.

Tommy and Wilbur watch him go in stunned silence.

"Shit– wallet!" Tommy yells abruptly, only for Wilbur to grab him by the upper arm and point to the steps a few meters away. Wilbur's wallet lays half open on its side; with halting motions, Tommy steps forward and scoops it up, flinching when the motion jars his wrist.

"Fucking hell, Tommy," Wilbur says, falling into place beside him. His brows are pinched

together, teeth worrying at his lower lip. "What was *that* all about?"

"I have no fucking clue." Tommy's shaking, little tremors that run up and down his spine. Adrenaline has replaced his limbs with jello; his palms are embedded with grit. They'll need to break out Wil's emergency first aid kit when they get back to his place.

Wilbur must notice his wince, because his hand reappears on Tommy's upper arm, once again steadying him. "Well, at least we have the wallet?" he tries.

"At least we have your fuckin' *rent* money, yeah," Tommy says wearily. He holds the wallet out with watery hands, hissing when the reddened skin around his wrist stretches.

"Tommy," Wilbur says, face paling. He ignores the wallet in favor of grabbing Tommy's hand, turning it until he can examine his wrist with short, efficient motions. "Oh, shit. That's gonna need cream, man. Antiseptic. That's *bad."*

Tommy grimaces. "Can't wait to go shopping for that."

"Better than it getting infected." Wilbur's finger grazes over the burn; Tommy braces for the fierce lance of fire, the sting of agitated nerves stinging his flesh, but it doesn't come. Instead, a sensation like cool water flows over his skin, rippling through his arm up to his elbow. Wilbur's hand, poised over his wrist, begins to glow– an eerie, pale light that sinks into the burn the way wax melts. Tommy watches, speechless, as the blisters begin to reverse, skin knitting back together and fading into its normal tone.

For one long beat, neither of them move, gazing at the freshly unmarred skin of Tommy's wrist.

He comes back to himself when something tugs at the hem of his pants. Tommy looks down; it's the raccoon he'd left at the mouth of the alley, chattering at him with front paws extended.

Tommy stares, uncomprehending. The raccoon chitters again, more insistent this time, and– and Tommy can't understand what it's saying. *Tommy can't understand it.*

"Oh, *fuck*," he says.

"What?" Wilbur demands, dropping his hand. "What is it?"

Tommy doesn't answer. Instead, with mechanical motions, he pulls out his other half of the cookie and hands it to the raccoon. It chitters again before backing away, cookie clutched in its paws; when Tommy doesn't move, it stuffs it into its mouth, drops to all fours, and scuttles back into the alley.

"I couldn't hear it," Tommy says belatedly.

"Oh." Wilbur replies. His voice is blank. "Oh, shit."

"Yeah." Slowly, Tommy rotates his wrist, waiting for the prickle of singed nerves. No pain. It's as if he'd never been burned at all. "Wil? I think we should– let's go back to your place, yeah?"

Wilbur's eyes are baffled behind the cracks in his glasses. For the first time since Tommy's met him, he appears at a complete loss for words. "Yeah," he says eventually. "That's…

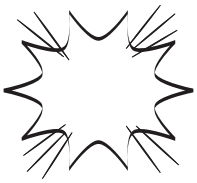
We should… do that."

Above them, the sun winks out, shadows engulfing the street; when Tommy cranes his neck, stormy clouds have begun scudding over the city around some unseen central point, a maelstrom bulging with water. Peals of thunder shudder the ground, and Tommy's stomach sinks to his feet.

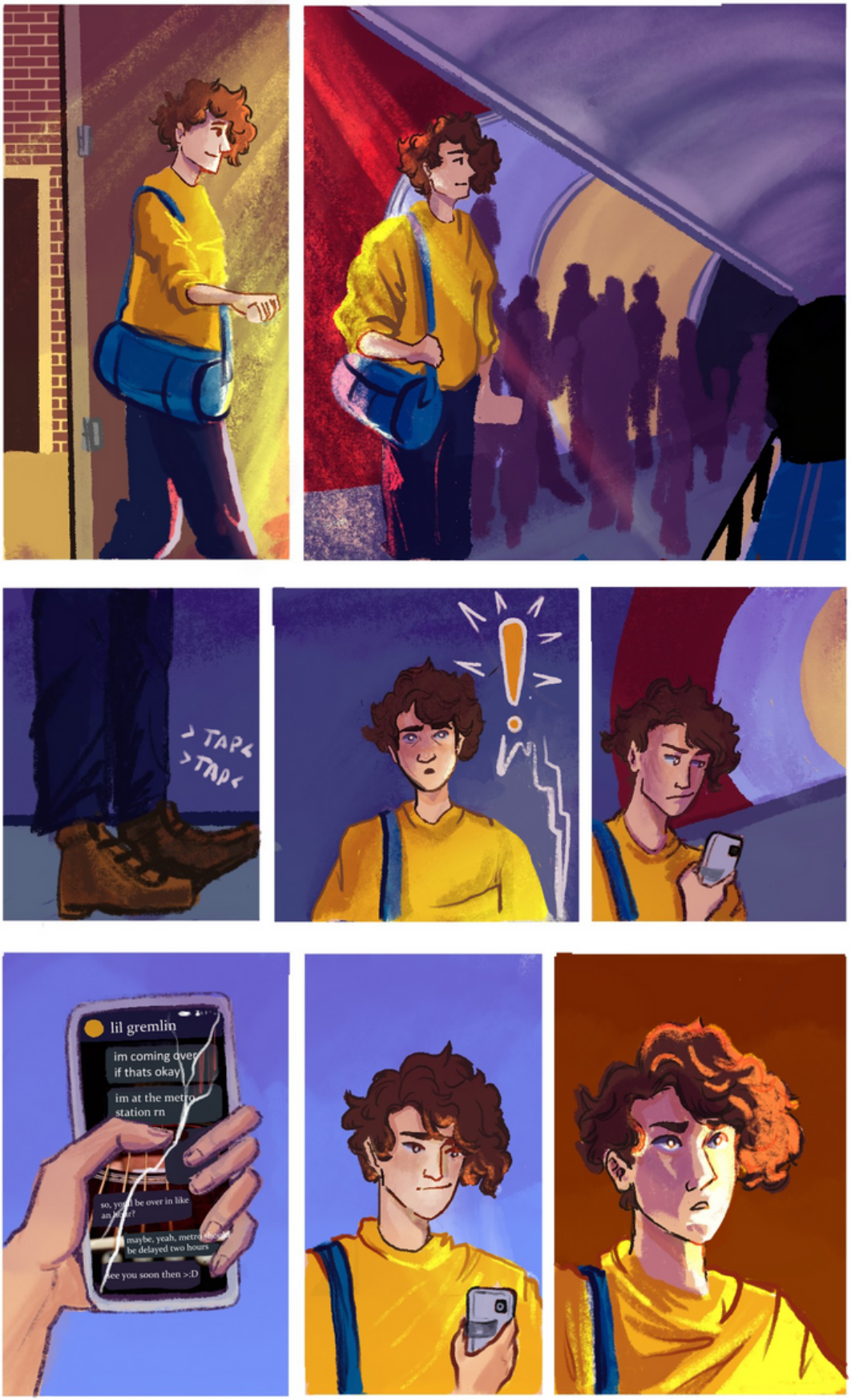
"Think we can risk the tram?" he ventures.

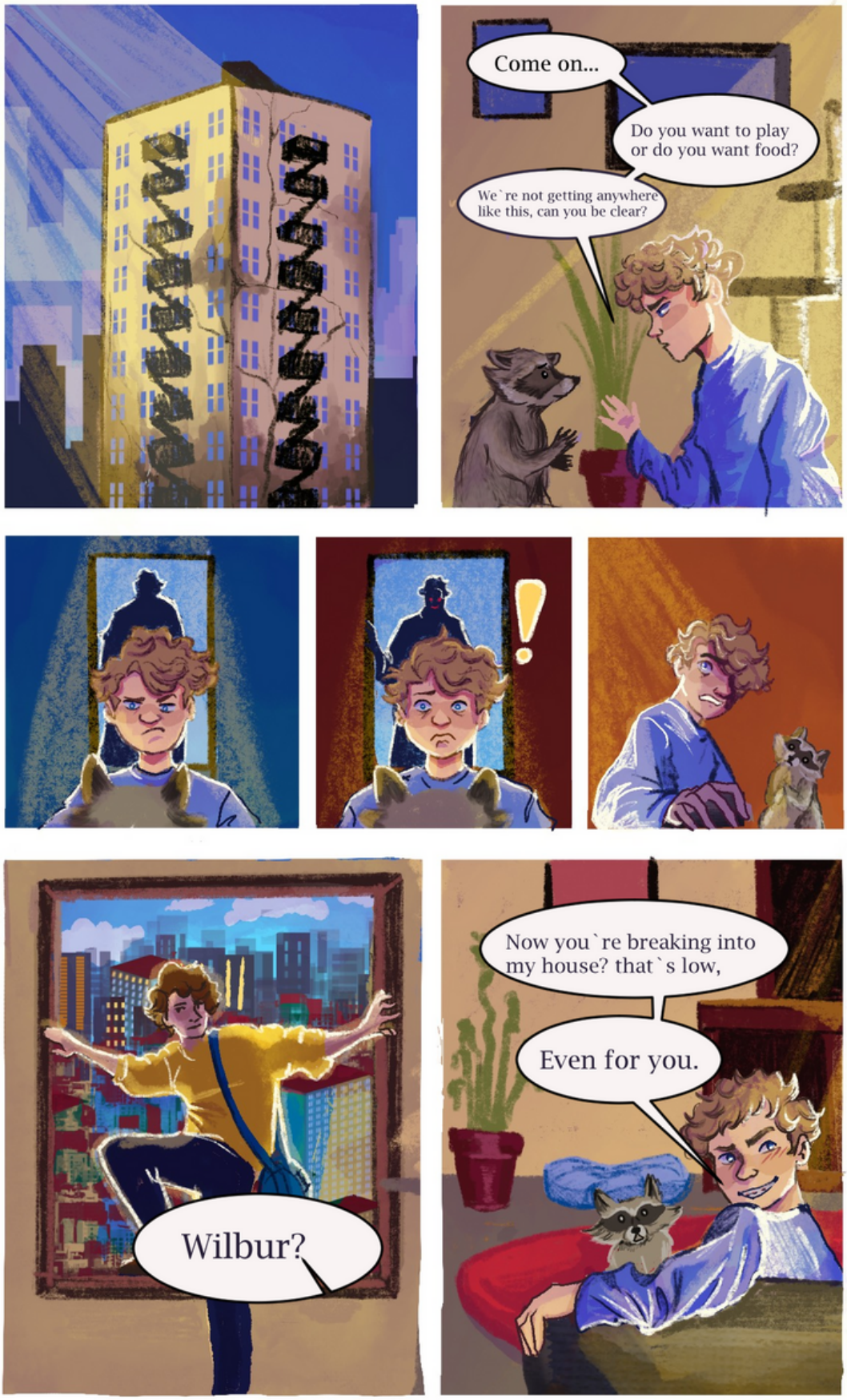
Wilbur glances up with him. "Yeah," he says again, and this time his voice shakes. "That… seems like a pretty good idea."

The clouds open up, and the sky begins to rain.



Creators: Destefaniart & zephrains


TAP
TAP
lil gremlin
im coming over if thats okay
im at the metro station rn
so, you'll be over in like an hour?
maybe, yeah, metro should be delayed two hours
see you soon then >:D


Come on...
Do you want to play or do you want food?
We`re not getting anywhere like this, can you be clear?
!
Wilbur?
Now you`re breaking into my house? that`s low,
Even for you.

You`re early
Didn`t you say your metro got delayed?
My trains always get delayed, Tommy
I assumed it would
Oh.
Okay?
Wait.
Isn`t that a good thing?

We will be fine.
Right, Wil?
I miss my powers too, Tommy
Uh-
You mean your shitty powers that make Everything go wrong,
Really?
Yeah. I do.

I guess I miss them
Because they were mine.
What if we don't-
Do you think we'll ever get them back?
I don't know, Tommy, but-
But We'll figure something out. Together.

Measure of a Man

Greyquills

CW: None

When Schlatt stared out into the street, there was nothing but silence—and this, of course, was the first indicator that something had gone hugely awry. He unlocked his window and slid the sash up so hard that it *banged* against the top of the frame; the sound seemed to reverberate down the street outside, like the spread of an earthquake's first fissure.

He didn't wince, or grimace, or make a face at the all-encompassing quiet. Schlatt liked to think that he was better than that—instead, he gripped the windowsill so tightly that his knuckles went white, and he leaned forward to glance down the street outside. The window's screen was long gone; Schlatt had a sudden, vivid flashback of attacking it with a kitchen knife several months ago.

Huh. The silence didn't feel natural; it wrapped itself around Schlatt's neck and *squeezed*, like a meaty fist tense with far too much intent. He stared out at the street for a moment longer in that terrifying, oppressive silence, and he drew in a sharp breath when it proved to be too much.

That was when the windowpane shattered—it went *bang*, with a sudden loss of pressure, and Schlatt threw himself back with a shout of surprise as shards of glass flew absolutely *everywhere*. Breathing hard, he stared at the carnage of his window… and felt something twist viciously in his stomach.

This couldn't be good. "Oh, shit," Schlatt said aloud—partly to himself, partly to whichever fucked-up deity was laughing while watching this stupid day of his play out. He'd have to board up the window. It was the only option.

But all thoughts of his windowpane quickly fled as it became more and more clear that *something* had gone wrong. Schlatt's day continued in the same grim fashion as before—several more shattered windowpanes, a burst pipe, a flash flood in his basement. In the morning, his toast caught on fire and set off the fire alarm before Schlatt could open a window; several stray cats darted into his apartment through the open screen door during the afternoon, and he had to resort to threats and a broom in order to get them out. Once the sun had set outside, signaling dusky twilight, Schlatt received several messages from his odd little team of villains signaling their resignation.

Then it was the text from one of his tenants, demanding to know where Schlatt got off on raising their rent. He tried to placate them, but the woman was angry enough that she threatened to break her lease come morning.
This couldn't be attributed to his normal sense of discord, either—Schlatt had no control over these things. This was new. This was *wrong*; he could feel the supernatural truth of it deep in the marrow of his bones. Something had changed. He needed to find out *what.*

So, later, after what had essentially been the worst meeting of his professional career and what he might also conservatively call the worst day of his entire goddamn life, Schlatt stumbled into a cafe for a place to sit down and think. A moment of peace and quiet; that's all he wanted, all he needed.

Of course, he couldn't even have that. As soon as Schlatt caught sight of the headline

splashed across the TV on the wall, still seething with rage, his breath caught in the back of his throat—***E.G.G. BEHIND OMINOUS POWER SWITCH?***

"Oh, *fuck*," Schlatt bit out, and a very small part of him he hoped that his fucked-up deity might agree with the sentiment, too.

If the news was to be believed—and Schlatt erred on the side of *very much fucking so*—then Schlatt had really ended up with the worst power of the bunch. And wasn't it just his luck, or lack thereof, that he'd run into its original owner just a few days after the whole shitshow had started? Schlatt didn't even need to blink when he spotted the figure ahead of him, lurking like a common criminal in the street. There he was: Wilbur Soot. In the very fucking flesh.

And wasn't this just yet *another* thing gone wrong, out of so many? Schlatt gritted his teeth together and dug his hands into his pockets so hard he thought he might accidentally rip the fabric into shreds.

"If it isn't lover boy himself," he called across the street—at the sound of his voice, Will froze in place, tensing all over, and whipped his head around like he'd been slapped. Well… it was always nice to know Schlatt was appreciated. "Out in town, huh?"

"Stay away from me," Will snapped, which was… odd. Usually, Schlatt thought, Wilbur Soot would be frothing at the mouth for an opportunity to take his self-proclaimed rival down a peg or two. He backed up a few steps, still glaring at Schlatt with an anger that Schlatt couldn't quite parse.

"What?" Schlatt said. He couldn't resist the urge to *taunt*, to fight, to draw blood—metaphorical, as it were, unless Wilbur felt the urge to duke it out in the street right here. "Cat got your tongue?" He wiggled his fingers in front of him, jazz-style, half-expecting sparks to fly from his fingernails into the cool night air. It was hard not to relish the way that Wilbur blanched. "Or your power, maybe?"

Will's glare might've cut through glass if he'd had the sense to aim it properly. "You're welcome to it," he bit out, tilting his head back so that Schlatt could just about make out the cruel glint in his eyes. It was unlike Wilbur—he was many things, but he wasn't *cruel*. Not usually. Not to Schlatt. "How are you managing, then?"

Schlatt scoffed. "Why do you want to know? This isn't fuckin' therapy."

Will shrugged, as if to say, *Who cares?* The sight made Schlatt's neck prickle with irritation.

"Color me curious."

"Asshole."

"Prick," Wilbur countered quickly, stepping into the street with all the confidence of a man with absolutely nothing to lose. Schlatt couldn't help but stare at him like he'd grown a second set of limbs; who was Wilbur to challenge him like this, after Schlatt had lost nearly *everything* thanks to Wilbur's power? It was a pleading sort of irritation that bubbled in his gut—the type that set his teeth on edge and made him clench his fists at his side. Dangerous. *Awful*.

"What'd you end up with, then," Schlatt said flatly, more out of a strange obligation to be *nice* than any other thing.

Wilbur's mouth pressed into a thin line. He wiggled his fingers in midair, the ghost of a smile gracing his lips. "Healing," he said. "Would you believe it? Me?"

Schlatt let out a short, bitten-off bark of laughter. "Barely," he said. "Nice to see you're being useful, for once."

The smile finally broke free on Wilbur's face. It was more of a grin, really—something viciously sarcastic. A sharp smile, like the shorn edges of shattered window glass. It seemed to cut at Schlatt's insides with every tilt of Will's chin.

"Aw, thanks," Wilbur said. "You know me. Always aiming to please." He was lying, clearly, but Schlatt couldn't stop himself from taking a step closer. Like a planet drawn in, inexorably and inevitably, by the sun's gravity. Wilbur always was the fuckin' sun, wasn't he? "I can be useful, Schlatt."

"Then tell me how you deal with it." Schlatt grit his teeth. He hated how desperate the words sounded. "How you dealt with it. How do I… how did you fuckin' cope?"

For a moment, Wilbur looked like he wanted to say something completely and wholly foolish. I don't, maybe, just to piss Schlatt off. Instead, he said, "Try not to think about it."

Schlatt blinked. "What?"

"You heard me," Will said. He spread his hands in front of him. "It's simple. Try not to think about what could go wrong. Exercise some control. It's not much, but it helps… especially on bad days." He hesitated, then, like he was about to add something else. Ultimately, he fell silent.

Schlatt had the momentarily horrible sense that asking Wilbur for advice was like looking in a mirror. He brushed it off, gritting his teeth, and said, "That's all you got?"

"That's it," Wilbur said. He smiled again. It was not a nice smile, this time, but something frankly horrible to look at for too long. "No magic cure-alls. Sorry to disappoint." He hesitated for a very long moment before he gave Schlatt an odd, wry look. Schlatt bristled underneath it. "Feel any better?"

He considered it for a long moment. If he didn't know any better, he'd say that Wilbur almost sounded as though he cared. "A little," he said finally, his lips curving into a pleased grin. Will blinked at him. "Enough to try and fuckin' wring your neck."

Will let out a choked-up sort of laugh. He was fast, though—he'd already darted back as soon as Schlatt made an aborted move forward, his hands raised in surrender. "Definitely feeling better, then," he said.

Schlatt scoffed. "I'm gonna fuckin' kill you, man," he said, bracing himself for a fight, and he was sure he didn't imagine the wild laughter that escaped Wilbur's throat as the two of them leapt for each other once again, a blur of claws and sharp teeth and anger.

Maybe Schlatt couldn't pinpoint the exact source of his misery—not yet; not exactly—but he knew that beating Wilbur to a pulp in the dingiest alleyway this side of Essempi would make him feel a whole lot fucking better than he had before. And—as he ducked sharply out of the way of Wilbur's punch, gritting his teeth together so hard he could taste iron—Schlatt thought to himself that didn't know what he'd do if it didn't.

VOL. 2

ESSEMPI

REACTION

Creator: IOWNFISH

Illustrated by IO

21

Creator: CONNOR

VRR VRR
RANBOO
VRR
VRR
VRR-
Hallo-
SOMETHING IS VERY WRONG, AND I LOOK WEIRD, AND ABNORMAL,
AND I DONT KNOW WHY-
WAIT! Are you also a cat?!
I- Wait what?

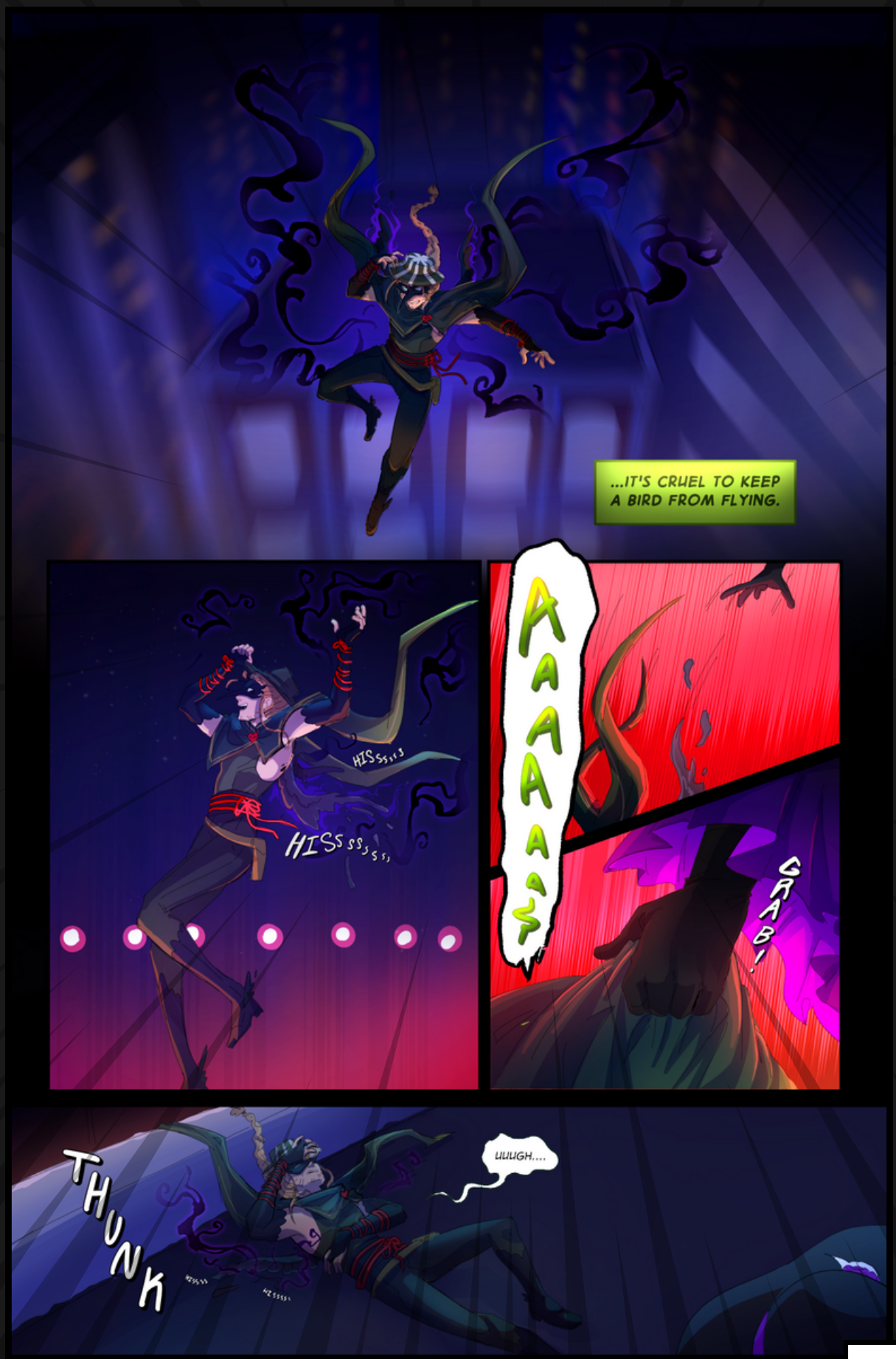
EARLIER THAT DAY...
TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP
THUD

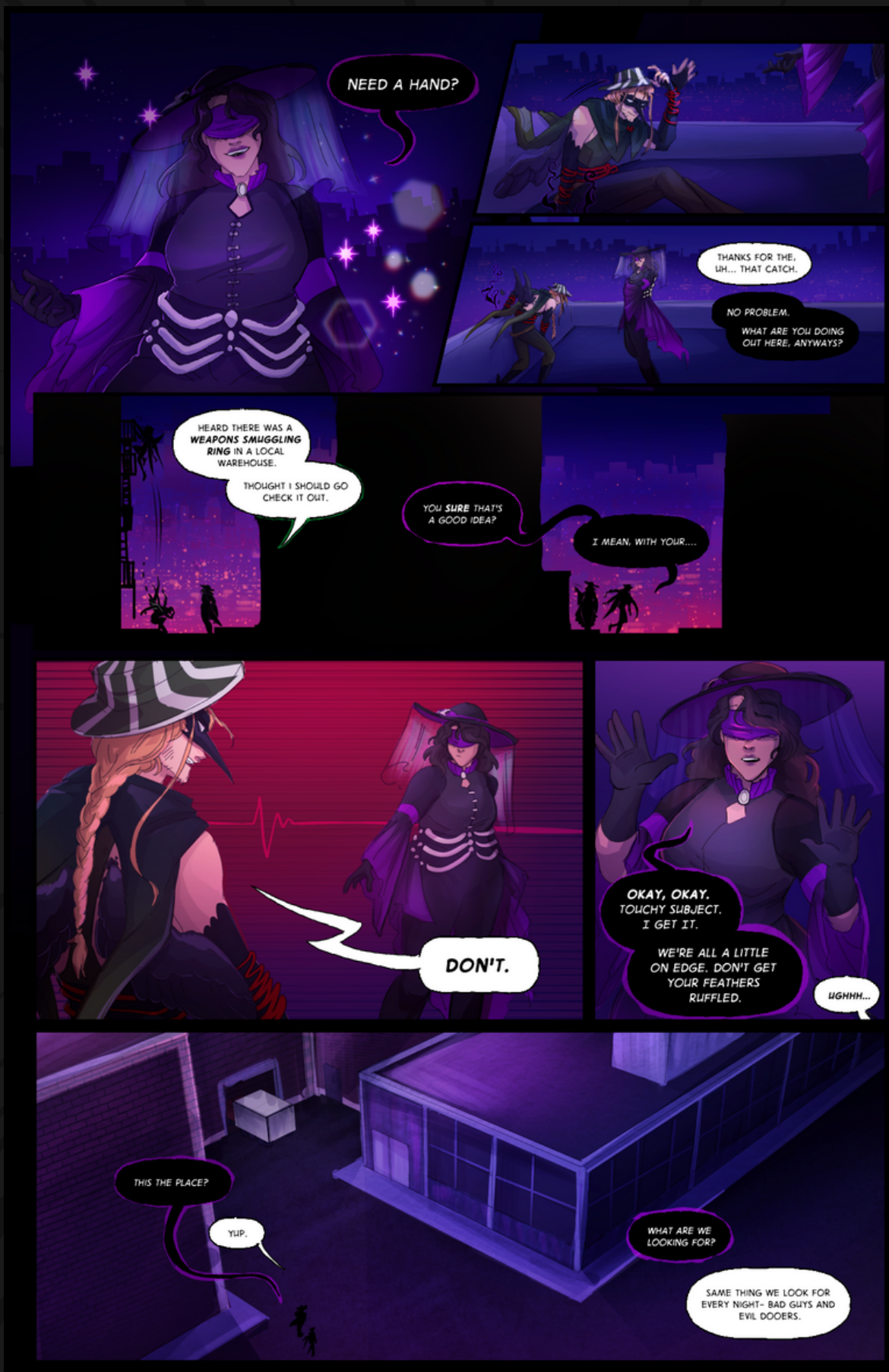
...Can I help-
Do you knyow what it's like to lose your thumbs?
YIKES
...
...
Would you like to?
...Niki?
YIKES
Can I come in?
Uh, sure

Thank you
SLAM!
...And thats pretty much it.
Ok, soooo what does this mean for us?
Is this some weird terrorist attack?
Is this karma for all the crimes?!
Oh god, I knew this would happen!
Ok, calm down,
I'm sure there has to be a very logical explanation to this

Which is????
...
...
I don't know, I could not tell you.
YIKES
=SMACK=
But Phil might know something!
YIKES
Speaking of,
where is phil?

Creators: Styx & Salt oftheEarth


...IT'S CRUEL TO KEEP A BIRD FROM FLYING.
HISSssss
HISSssssss
AAAAAAA!
GRAB!
THUNK
UUUGH....


NEED A HAND?
THANKS FOR THE, UH... THAT CATCH.
NO PROBLEM.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING OUT HERE, ANYWAYS?
HEARD THERE WAS A WEAPONS SMUGGLING RING IN A LOCAL WAREHOUSE.
THOUGHT I SHOULD GO CHECK IT OUT.
YOU SURE THAT'S A GOOD IDEA?
I MEAN, WITH YOUR....
DON'T.
OKAY, OKAY. TOUCHY SUBJECT. I GET IT.
WE'RE ALL A LITTLE ON EDGE. DON'T GET YOUR FEATHERS RUFFLED.
UGHHH...
THIS THE PLACE?
YUP.
WHAT ARE WE LOOKING FOR?
SAME THING WE LOOK FOR EVERY NIGHT- BAD GUYS AND EVIL DOERS.

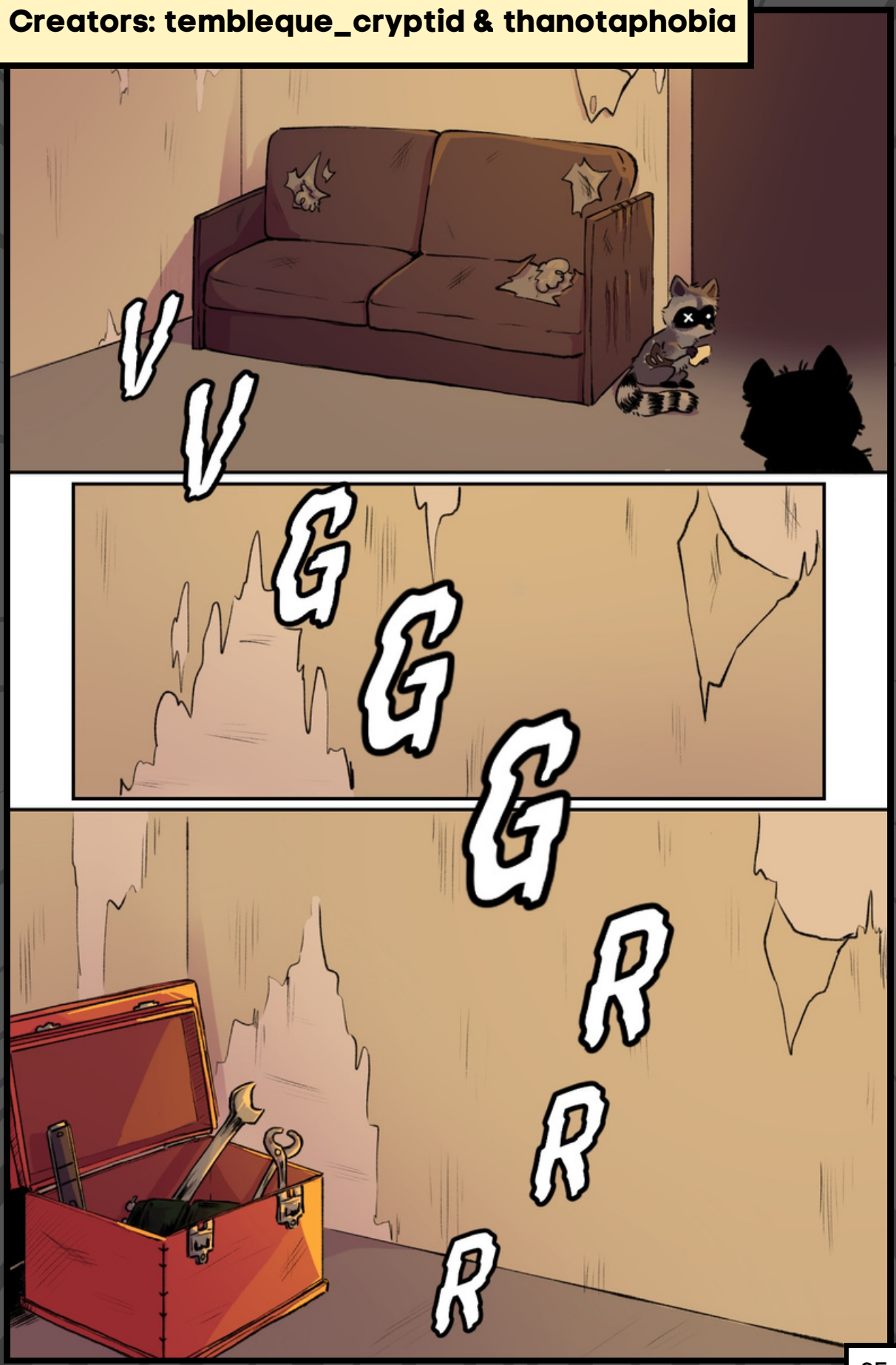
FEELS LIKE... FOUR PEOPLE, ALL WITH REGENERATIVE POWERS?
SOUNDS FUN.
ALLOW ME.
AFTER YOU~
WHY THANK YOU, KIND STRANGER~
BAM!!...
AH, FUCK.
NICE GOING, JONNY.
'S NOT MY FAULT--
ACK~

GRAB!
SWEEP
BANG!
BONK
NIGHTSHADE! WHAT ARE YOU--
BONK
OH, SHIT!
OH, THEY REGENERATE, HE'LL BE FINE--
NIGHTSHADE!!!
BANG!!
-OW!!
SORRY, SORRY!

SEE, I HANDLED HIM.
HANDLED?! YOU HIT HIM WITH A FEMUR BONE!!!
WELL IT WORKED, DIDN'T IT?
OH-KAY--
UGH.....
SO.... ANY PLANS AFTER THIS?
PFFT- ARE YOU ASKING ME OUT?
NAHHH, I NEED A COCOA. IT'S FUCKIN' COLD OUT. WANTED TO SEE IF YOU WANTED ONE, TOO.
MUCH AS I'D LOVE TO, I DO HAVE PLANS IN THE MORNING. AND, I'VE GOTTA GET MY WRIST CLEANED UP.
S-SORRY... ABOUT THAT.
AGAIN.
MAYBE NEXT TIME, TALON.
BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!
06:45:05
UGGGHHH.....
PLEASE STAND BACK FROM THE PLATFORM EDGE, UNTIL YOUR TRAIN HAS COME TO A COMPLETE STOP.
IT'S WAY TOO EARLY FOR THIS...

HEY MATE!
HELLO!
ANYTHING INTERESTING HAPPEN SINCE I LAST SAW YOU?
NAH, HAD A LATE NIGHT WITH MY LEGOS, Y-
END
STYX

Creators: tembleque_cryptid & thanotaphobia



R
R
R
R
R
R...
WELL BOSSMAN,
I THINK THAT'S THE BIGGEST DENT I CAN GET

sizzle...
THAT'S NOT EVEN A SCRATCH!
HEY, I TRIED!

WE COULD TRY THE FLAMETHROWER NEXT?
WE'D HAVE TO GO OUTSIDE.

HELLLLO BOYS!
TOMMY DON'T BRING YOUR RACOONS IN HERE!
HEY, IT TOOK MY SCREWDRIVER!
!!
!!
YEET!

%%#?!&$!
CLUNK!
!!
BAM!
CRASH!
DO YOU SEE WHAT I HAVE TO DEAL WITH?
CLANK!
BONK!
sigh

whiskey, neat

Roseycheeked

CW: Alcohol

"Fancy a drink?"

Tubbo doesn't turn around. At Las Nevadas, one need not fear old friends. One usually doesn't make any new friends either, but safety is safety, and in Essempi, villains and vigilantes alike are hard-pressed to find a better hotspot. At its inception, back when it was just a passion project by a low-level villain looking to make a mark, Tubbo had said, "If you do this, Q, there'll always be a target on your back."

Quackity had smiled, wide and ghastly. It wasn't a genuine smile; it was the one he wore when he was trying to convince you of his own certainty. "That's the idea. Everyone will know my name."

Props to him, Tubbo supposes. He'd achieved his goal and then some. On TV, the HOA calls him a "ringleader" and a "high-priority target." In reality, Quackity has enough friends in high places so as to be untouchable—him and his casino both. And he was right: everybody does know his name.

"Facade," says Tubbo, turning around at last. There's Quackity, striding in through the doorway, a drink in each hand. Two whiskeys, neat, each a deep mahogany color. He holds himself, like he always does, as if he has something to prove. Tubbo wonders if anyone's ever told him. No one actually self-assured walks around like that, Quackity. You give yourself away.

Quackity slides into the barstool next to Tubbo's, giving him a nod. "Aegis. Good to see you back."

Tubbo very clearly isn't looking for company. He's come to a usual haunt of his, a deserted back room of the casino with nothing but a dusty, unstocked bar and a couple of taped-up cardboard boxes. But Quackity seems to have been…looking for him. He'd come here, Tubbo's preferred drink in hand, when he could be out schmoozing with the city's worst.

"Sure," he says. He'll humor this, he decides. Quackity is a man made of ulterior motives and ambition, but maybe he really does want to catch up with an old friend. "I'm back."

Quackity pushes one of the whiskeys over toward him with two fingers.

"I'll pass," says Tubbo.

"All right," says Quackity. He still raises an eyebrow. "Bad day?"

"Just long. Patrolling," Tubbo says. He looks down at the polished wood of the counter, tracing his eyes idly over the grain.

"Not much action lately," Quackity points out.

Tubbo jerks up to look at him. Quackity chuckles a little. "We all got Swapped, Tu—Aegis. No

one's making trouble."

It's Tubbo's turn to scoff. "Plenty of criminals with no powers, bossman. You and I both know this city—"

"Has gone to shit," Quackity finishes. "Yeah, all right. It's just been, uh. An adjustment."

"Not happy with your lot, then?" says Tubbo. He finds that he's leaned forward a bit, telegraphing far too much interest. Embarrassing. He sits up straighter. "What have you got?"

Rather than answer, Quackity sweeps to his feet. One arm he holds aloft as if on the verge of conducting a grand symphony, the other he relaxes at his side. With his whole body, he gestures upwards, a flick and a pull. Here is a man born to be a puppet-master, or at least a man who has put years of practice into seeming like one.

The glass of whiskey Tubbo turned down rises suddenly into the air—unbound, he realizes, from the strength of the planet's usual gravity. Purpled's old power. Quackity can't resist a show, though, so he turns his arm at the elbow, slow and careful, as the liquid lifts out of the glass—lighter, separate—and it catches the dim overhead light, glistening suddenly, a midair melted gemstone. Then he relaxes, bringing his arm slowly down as the glass clinks against the counter. One final flourish, and the whiskey splashes back into the glass.

He sits back down on the stool, eyes on Tubbo.

"I'm not applauding that," Tubbo says, half-smiling to soften the words.

"But it was cool, right?" asks Quackity.

Leading question. "Yeah, yeah. Very cool."

Quackity nods, decisive. He casts his gaze around the obviously empty room, then says, "Well, where are the boys? What are they up to?"

Tubbo came here to be alone, because he loves Tommy and he loves Ranboo and he's glad they got Swapped into fun new powers, but if he'd spent another second with them as Tommy summoned another dead rat to gnaw uselessly at Ranboo he would have just about burst.

He'd much rather focus on Quackity's sudden change of subject, distinctly contradicting the dramatics of his performance mere moments ago. Does he want Tubbo for data on other vigilantes' new powers? Surely he has feelers deep in the rumor mill for that sort of thing.

"Took the rest of the day off," he says eventually. "We called it after a morning patrol."

"Swap didn't get 'em, then?" Quackity persists.

Tubbo scoffs, stung. "You know as well as I do that everyone in this bloody city with a superpower got Swapped. So yes, Facade. Red Raccoon got Swapped. The Horror got Swapped. I got Swapped. Is that what you came here for?"

"No, no," Quackity says, in that awful wheedling voice he reserves for backpedaling. "I was looking for company, Aegis, and you've always made for good company. I don't need—I'm

not friends with you for information."

"I wasn't sure," says Tubbo primly, "that we were friends."

"Hey, of course we're friends, man," Quackity says. "We go way back. I owe you...I mean, we owe each other a lot."

Tubbo raises an eyebrow. Taps his fingers on the bar a couple times. "You want to know their powers. You want to know my power. And you want to bring up our past to get me to tell you."

"I never said—"

Here's the thing: despite all appearances, Tubbo has thought this through. If he gives Q what he wants right now, he'll be much more receptive when Tubbo turns the conversation back to Q's Swapped power, which he so deftly steered Tubbo away from before.

So he says, "And I'll tell you. Because we're friends, I'll tell you. Red Raccoon's got necromancy. The Horror's got invulnerability. And me?" He can hear his voice rising, feel himself taking gulping breaths to make up for it, but no dice. "All I can do is this!"

He pops his left eye out of its socket. It hovers before him right at eye-level, where it'd be if there were a second him to provide a body to go with it. If he focuses, he can even see through it, fuzzy and strange.

Absurdly, Quackity laughs. "Christ, kid. Maybe you should've been the showman."

He flicks a lazy hand, the motion echoing backward through Tubbo's memories, the Quackity of old in his mind's eye revealing a winning hand with a flourish, dealing to a rapt table: flop, turn, river. At his gesture, Tubbo's detached eye drops, then rises, then drops again; Tubbo reaches out and propels it along with a single finger.

They're both silent for a moment, transfixed, as the eye gains a little spin. The sounds of the casino grow loud in the absence of conversation: someone's groan of despair, someone's shout of delight. Tubbo's glad he didn't bother with looking through the eye. Surely he would have been sick.

He's midway through examining the blood vessels 'round the back of it—like a mountain highway, or a winding path through the woods—when Quackity says, "What the fuck, man?"

The utter grotesqueness of what they're doing occurs to Tubbo all at once. He chokes on a helpless laugh, unable to form a proper reply. What the hell would he say? Hope you were having a good time examining my eyeball just then, cool squiggly line on the left of it, huh? Kind of the shape of a cat if you squint.

"What the fuck are we doing?" repeats Quackity, incredulous. He's holding back a smile, Tubbo can tell.

And so he indulges him. Lets his own smile out.

Quackity does a double take—has it been that long since Tubbo smiled at him?—and then winces as Tubbo all but sucks the offending eyeball back into the socket.

“I see what you mean,” he says, after swallowing down his apparent disgust. “The forcefields were much more—”

“What?” Tubbo demands, suddenly seething with it. Yes, it’s nothing like the old power, but for Quackity to state it outright—

“You,” says Quackity simply.

“Excuse me?” Tubbo says.

“Not showy, not subtle,” Quackity explains. “They got the job done. Aegis, I know how you tick. I get it.”

The sheer arrogance! “I don’t think you do,” says Tubbo. “I don’t think you *can*.”

“Are you just looking for someone to feel sorry for you?” Quackity snaps, riled at last. “Someone who’ll feel all sympathetic but never say a word?

"I just say it how it is. I thought by now you’d know that.”

“Believe me, I know how you tick, Facade,” Tubbo spits. “Before, with the glass, and the woo-woo splash—that was a show.”

Quackity bares his teeth in a grin that spells Caution. Tubbo finds himself quite immune to the grimaces of desperate men.

“You don’t put on a show unless there’s something to hide,” says Tubbo, suddenly saccharine. “You’re too good for that. You don’t waste your time.”

“Sue me for showing off to an old friend,” Quackity drawls, but his eyes are just a bit too wide and his posture is honestly all off. Tubbo squashes his pity before it can sprout in his throat and make him say, Look at yourself, man. Get your shit together.

Instead, he shrugs. “Show off all you want, mate. Just don’t lie to my face, is all.”

The trouble with knowing a man famous for keeping his hand close and his secrets closer is that when you try to use that knowledge against him, he’s quick to retreat and quicker to snap. Somewhere along the line, Tubbo had wanted to help. He had! But Quackity is just exquisite at driving people away, isn’t he?

“I am a liar,” says the man in question, enunciating each word.

“That’s no excuse!” Tubbo retorts with some disbelief. “Are you scared, then? Scared of me?”

“I was there at the start,” says Quackity quietly. “I took you under my wing. I taught you the business: how to move, how to fight, how to read someone with just a look. You defected and I never held a grudge, never even considered it, because I know what it’s like to want a team. A side you can call just your own.

“But I think you’ll find that I can lie to anyone I want—you included—because I made you.”

He draws a deep breath, then lets it out, expression alight. “I made you, Tubbo!” It’s his trump card. You can see it around his eyes, the tilt of his mouth, readying for victory.

“Aegis,” Tubbo grinds out. “Aegis, or I tell Karl J—”

The glass of whiskey closer to Tubbo abruptly crumples in on itself, utterly shattering in the space of a breath.

Tubbo doesn’t flinch. He doesn’t fucking flinch. But on instinct he tries to summon a forcefield and comes up utterly empty, and the single spark of panic shooting down his spine is enough to shake him to the core. The glass shatters, and in the twitch of Tubbo’s eye, the shift of his arm—weakness.

“If you,” breathes Quackity, trembling now, “so much as look at Karl, your secrets are forfeit. Your identity is forfeit.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” Tubbo says, waving him off. It has a little bit of Tommy’s obnoxious Mimimi cadence to it, to be honest. “Good to know you’re still carrying a torch for the guy, eh?”

Quackity laughs coldly. “You don’t know anything,” he says, “about anything.”

Tubbo almost feels bad calling his bluff—the man is clearly off his game today—but he so rarely gets the opportunity to pull one over a professional like Big Q.

“So Wildfire is nothing to you, then?” Tubbo says, pretending innocence. He blinks, demure. “That apartment he and Jacobs share? All that history—”

His heart thrums with adrenaline as he savors each tantalizing morsel of information. And—bingo. Quackity shoves himself off his barstool to stand, menacing, shaking a finger in Tubbo’s direction.

“Don’t you dare,” he says. “You don’t want me as an enemy, Aegis. You know you don’t want me as your enemy.”

“We’re not enemies,” Tubbo tells him, simple as anything. “We can’t be. I know everything about you, and you know everything about me.”

Quackity lets his hand drop to his side, shoulders still taut with the tension of the moment.

“It’s a stalemate,” says Tubbo. “Always will be.”

And then it hits him. Quackity, standing in this abandoned and dusty room conducting a symphony with gravity itself, while a week ago he could have stepped into someone else’s skin and taken a blow in their stead—Wildfire, Rewind, no wonder he was all over the place. What was making things crumple and float in comparison to extremely effective self-sacrifice?

A week ago Tubbo would never have flinched at the shatter of a glass. He had any forcefield imaginable at his fingertips—he had no nightmares about Tommy getting skewered by debris, no visions of getting pinned by a faceless enemy in an alleyway, unable to break free. It was all but in his name. Aegis.

Facade.

He laughs, unbidden.

“What?” Quackity snaps, still stung.

Both of them are so very afraid. Is that why Quackity was looking for him? Tubbo, a kindred spirit! Imagine that.

“We can’t protect them anymore,” he says. “Not like we did.”

Between one blink and the next, Quackity changes. His expression softens somehow. His limbs relax, as if unseen strings have gone slack. He sits down again.

“No,” he agrees, very quietly. “No, we can’t.”

“And they don’t get it, do they?”

“They *can’t*,” says Quackity. “You know that. If they knew—”

That Quackity had a habit of stepping into Wildfire’s skin, or Rewind’s, or any other ally he felt was worth protecting, and taking their fights for them? That Tubbo would work himself to exhaustion night after night training his forcefields to form into shields that would mold themselves to Tommy, to Ranboo, to whoever was faithfully watching Tubbo’s back?

“Nothing for them to know now,” says Tubbo.

Quackity shakes his head. “So the Horror’s invulnerable, huh? That must be some peace of mind, at least.”

“Red summoned about sixty rats to try and bite him this morning,” Tubbo says long-sufferingly.

“Wildfire brought down my whole camera system when he found out what he could do. Replaced every shot with a picture of him flexing. Man, he was so fucking proud of himself.”

Panic flares in Quackity’s eyes when what he’s said sinks in. But he does not take it back.

“I always thought I’d be killer with technopathy,” Tubbo says, instead of You trust me. Why do you trust me?

“Better luck next time,” Quackity quips.

More precious than any dirty secret, any truce for the media to get its sticky hands on, is the trust that exists between two men who could very easily unmake each other. Unbroken, it will last longer than any hero-villain defeat, any sentencing of a high-profile criminal. Any mask, any shield.

“Are you going to fight it?” Tubbo asks. “The Swap.”

Quackity’s mouth twists to the side, noncommittal. “It did ruin our fucking lives a little, huh.”

Tubbo snorts. “You could say that.”

“Are you?” asks Quackity.

“Dunno,” says Tubbo. “Hard to know what was done to us—whether or not it can be undone.”

“Best not get our hopes up, then,” Quackity says with a small smile.

“No,” says Tubbo, “best not.”

Heaving a sigh, Quackity picks up the remaining glass from the bar, knocks the drink back in one go, and winces gladly at the burn. Tubbo begins fidgeting with his pinky finger: detaching it with a thought, then calling it back. Over and over, the snick of detachment, the pop of reunion.

“Dude,” Quackity says quietly. Snick. Pop. Snick. Pop. “What the hell?”

Tubbo huffs, feigning annoyance. “Practice makes perfect. Gotta put on that show.”

“Touché,” says Quackity. “Don’t let me get in your way.”

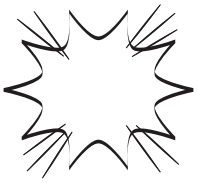
He makes to stand, empty glass in hand—but suddenly, ridiculously, the thought of being alone in this room again fills Tubbo with dread. Since when does he like speaking with Quackity? Minutes ago they were shouting at each other.

But then again, out of everyone he knows, only Quackity has quite understood the suffocating panic that comes with not being needed anymore. Of things never being quite how they used to be.

“Hey,” he says. Quackity pauses mid-step. Doesn’t quite turn around. “Bring me back a whiskey, will you? Neat.”

In the shadow of the doorway, Tubbo can make out the ghost of a grin as it passes over Quackity’s face.

“Coming right up.”



The Power Swap
ISSUE 3: ADJUSTMENT
Good Pharmacy
Creator: Flowchi Elmflowers
DSMP
FLOWCHI ELMFLOWERS

BEEP BEEP
7:59
8:00
G R O A N
OH!
YOU GUYS ARE STILL HERE?
WHY?
OOH... I SEE... YOU WANT A VLOG.
I'M NOT REALLY DOING MUCH TODAY,
BUT OKAY I GUESS-
PURPLED'S DAY OFF VLOG!:
WELL, THERE WAS NO NEED TO CUT ME OFF, A-HOLES.

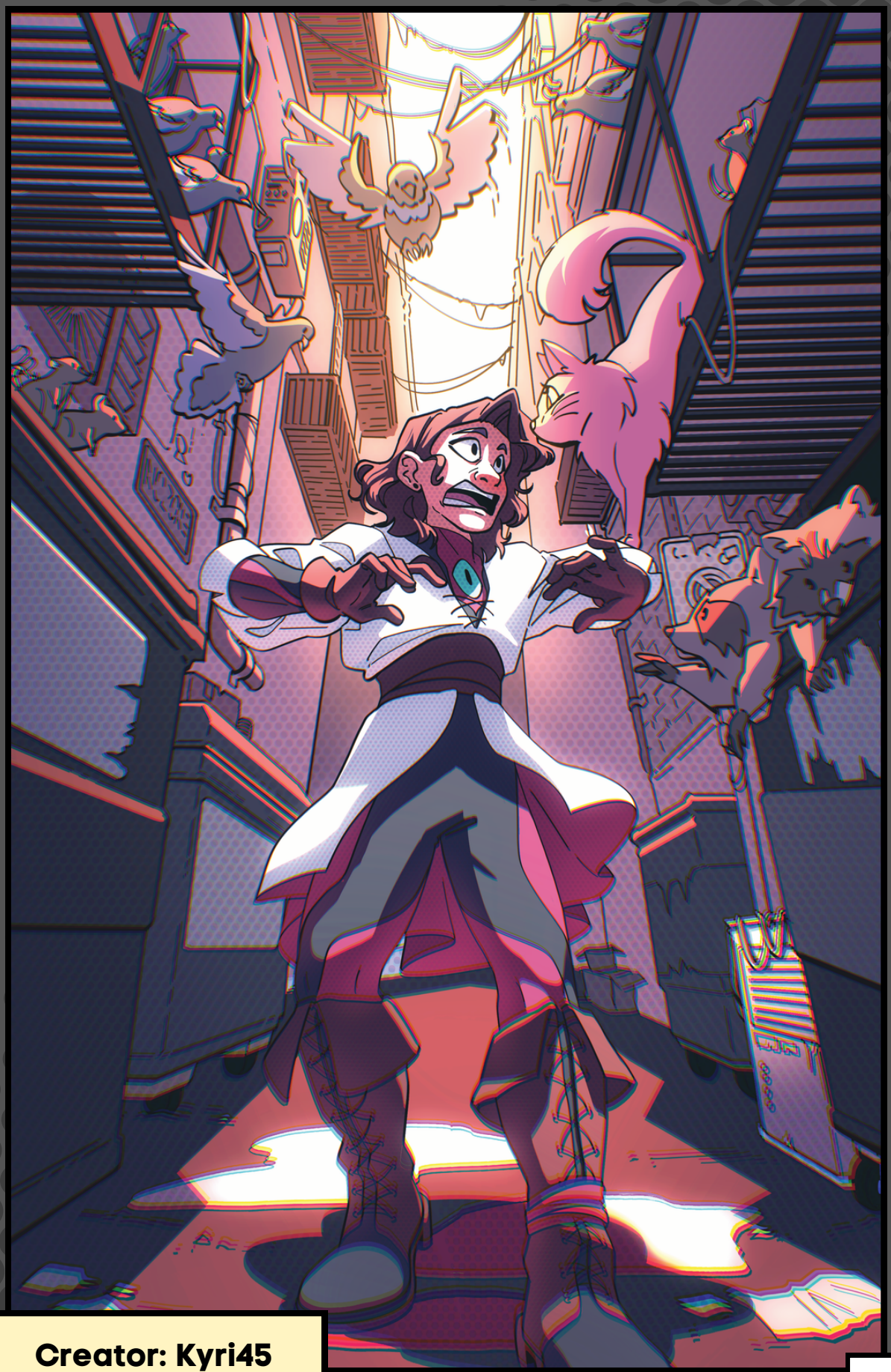
SO ARE YOU GOING TO WATCH ME ALL DAY?
I TAKE THAT AS A YES.
WHAT I DON'T GET IS: WHY ARE YOU GUYS HERE TODAY?
I DON'T EVEN HAVE A JOB ASSIGNED TODAY.
I LITERALLY COMPLETED A HEIST YESTERDAY!
YOU DIDN'T WANT TO SEE THAT?
YOU GUYS SUCK.
WHATEVER, I HAVE TO SEE QUACKITY ANYWAY.
OH! I SEE HOW IT IS!
YOU DON'T WANT TO SEE ME BREAK INTO A MUSEUM BUT YOU WANT TO SEE QUACK-

WHO'S VLOG DO YOU THINK THIS IS?
WHATEVER...
AT LEAST I DIDN'T HAVE TO WALK OVER HERE.
KNOCK
KNOCK
COME IN!
HEY PURPLED.
HAVING FUN WITH MY POWERS?
SHUT IT!
OR I'M NOT PAYING YOU.
WOAH! WOAH!
SORRY!
YOU LIKE THIS GUY?
REALLY?
GIVE ME A SECOND.
I NEED A PEN TO SIGN THE CHECK.
SHUFFLE
SHUFFLE

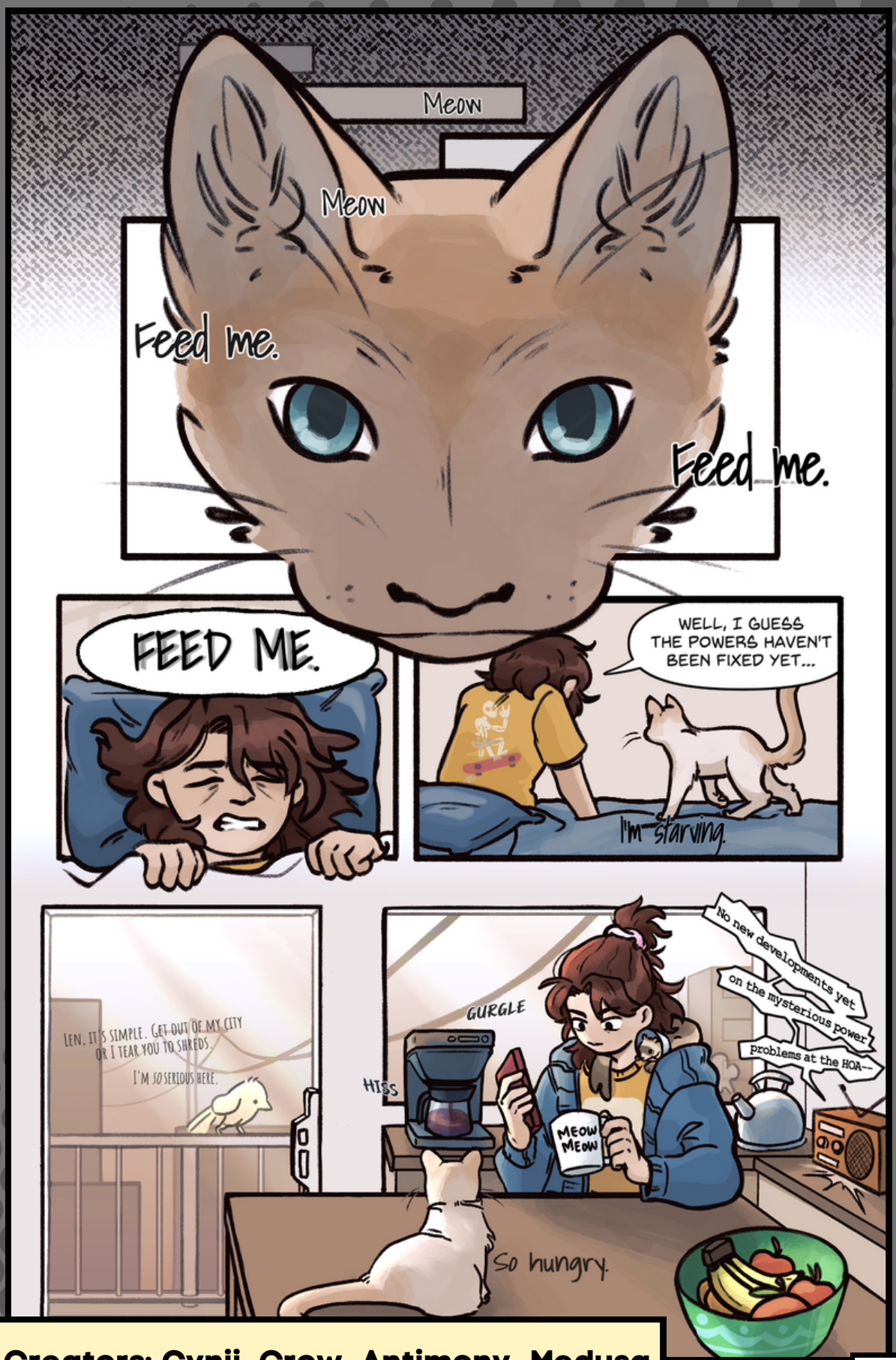
OH!
I GOT YOU!
YOINK
HERE YOU GO!
THANKS?
?
?
ALRIGHT, HERE'S YOUR CUT.
SIGN
SIGN
ALSO,
HERE'S YOUR PEN!
WHAT THE-
BYE QUACKITY!

I WOULD SAY
THAT WENT PRETTY WELL!
THAT'S ALL I HAD PLANNED TODAY-
BUMP
OOF
UGH
PEOPLE ARE SO RUDE NOWADAYS
AND I'M A GUN-FOR-HIRE.
ANYWAY AS I WAS SAYING I'M PRETTY MUCH DONE SO YOU GUYS CAN LEAVE-

HEY! YOU!
WTF?
ARE YOU TALKING TO THEM?!
WHAT?
WHO EVEN IS THIS GUY?
THERE!
YOU JUST SPOKE TO THEM!!
WHERE ARE THEY?
DO YOU KNOW HIM?
CAN THEY HEAR ME RIGHT NOW?!
WAIT!
YOU'RE NOT SERIOUSLY LEAVING ME WITH THIS LUNATIC?!
TELL THEM I'M STILL HERE!
YOU CAN'T JUST END THE VLOG!
IT'S ME!
IT'S MY VLOG!
WHY ARE YOU TWO YELLING IN MY CASINO?!
THE END.



Creator: Kyri45

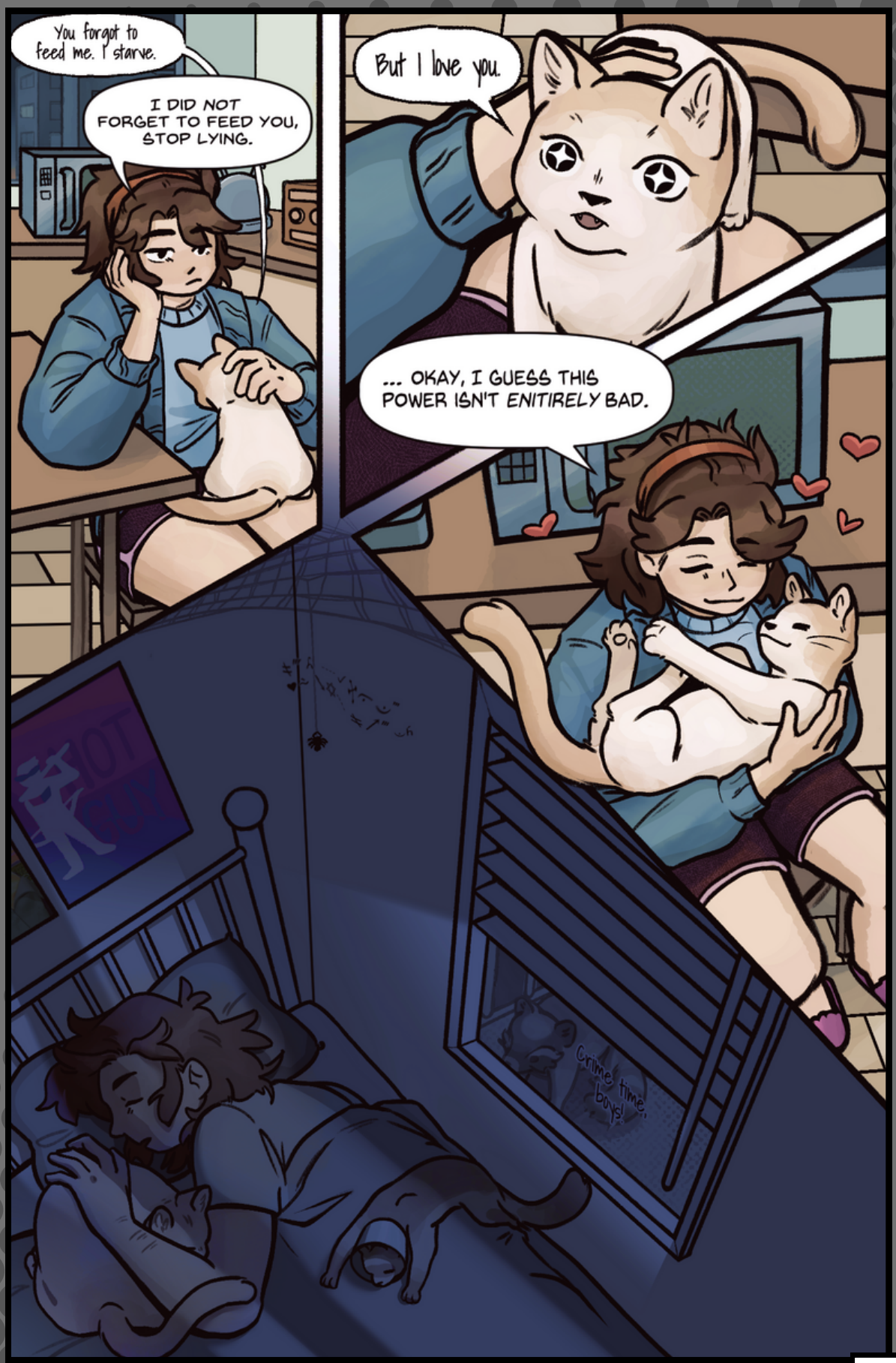


Creators: Gynii, Crow, Antimony_Medusa

HI, GOOD MORNING!
G'MORNING, ERET! HOPE YOU AREN'T TOO MESSED UP BY THAT POWER ISSUE!
That's them. Only motherfucker I respect. Dropped a whole danish once.
VROOM
WOULD HAVE BEEN GREAT TO KNOW THAT WAS COMING...
Skill issue.

-- YOU STILL GOOD FOR THE CAKE?
I want to break something
RING
RING
RING
YES, OF COURSE.
UNFORTUNATELY, THAT'S NOT GOING TO--
Sam (Warden)
BZZT!
BZZT!
Disaster @ 52 and North.
Ur needed.
omw
COULD YOU WATCH OZZY?
I HAVE TO RUN.
MA'AM, WITH THE POWER SITUATION AS IT IS, I'M UNABLE TO--

I WASN'T SOLD AT FIRST, BUT SO FAR THIS POWER HAS BEEN TREATIN' ME PRETTY ALRIGHT.
01:22
party in 20
Warm
Rewards for good service should not be deferred a single day.
UNHAND ME!
HAPPY BIRTHDAY
You should steal that cake.


You forgot to feed me. I starve.
I DID NOT FORGET TO FEED YOU, STOP LYING.
But I love you.
... OKAY, I GUESS THIS POWER ISN'T *ENITIRELY* BAD.
Crime time, boys!

Learn to Love This Kind of Atmosphere

Creator: Odigahara

CW: Vehicle accidents, dead body

If the definition of insanity was trying the same thing over and over again and expecting different results, Fundy must have gone off the deep end a long time ago. He tilted his chair against the wall again, pressing the back of his head against the metal and concentrating, and for the fifty thousandth fucking time he came up blank.

He knew there were gaps in the walls, at least for circuitry. He understood on a scientific level that no expensive flying air base, regardless of the inconceivably short-sighted loans that a twopenny villain took out to fund it, could avoid the infestations that came of living in the world: weevils and cockroaches in henchman's pantries! Drain flies in the bathrooms! Fucking fruit flies because some asshole lab tech let an apple rot in the back of the biohazard refrigerator! There should have been something. Ants in the vents. Mice. Something.

And yet Fundy had been squirming in his bonds for an hour now, broken rib twinging, nosebleed starting and stopping according to no pattern he could follow, and his powers hadn't snagged on anything.

It didn't make any sense. The villain who had captured him was so low priority that Fundy wasn't even sure of his codename– maybe because he seemed like he was from a different city, maybe because he hadn't confronted Fundy in person but sent some henchmen to beat the shit out of him instead. He shouldn't have known about Animus, who was also kind of low priority according to the HOA, not to the extent that he annihilated all animal life within range. Actual germaphobes with a terror of bed bugs couldn't do that, and Fundy had seen some of them try.

He would have given his left arm, or alternatively the tip of his pinky finger because he was attached to having an arm actually, for a nest of bed bugs right then. Creepy, crawly bodies to slip his consciousness into. If he had enough insects, he could pick locks with them. He could steal a keycard and have a way to open the door.

Relatedly, if it turned out Wild Card wasn't in the fucking base to start with, Fundy would scream. This was the last rescue mission he'd do for that guy, that was for sure.

"You should come help me before they make me tell them things, Animus," he muttered, bonking his head against the wall. The motion upset his balance; he tipped forward with a thunk, rattling his teeth. Ow. "You're a professional, Animus. You're brilliant, you can save the day instead of being a villain for once–"

What Fundy really needed wasn't a collection of drain flies. He needed something to cut himself free and let him spoof the locking mechanism, or alternatively attack the door hinges that some moron had put on the inside of the cell.

A screwdriver. A knife. He'd take a cheese grater at this point.

Plus, if some benevolent god decided to drop Fundy a knife, he could use it on the next henchman to come in. Stab them and make a break for it, slash their throat so they'd stop

freaking *hitting* him, there was a wealth of options–

Clink.

"Wild Card?" he ventured. No answer. He glanced around again, inched his foot– he'd wriggled his feet free, at least– toward the knife and dragged it closer. "... God?"

God also did not answer. Considering that Fundy lived a life of crime, this was not a surprise.

Fundy caught the knife handle between his feet and flipped it up into his mouth, a fun party trick that anyone could learn with barely a few urgent care visits in between. He contorted himself unpleasantly to get it to his hands, then sawed himself loose and stretched, vertebrae popping.

The hinges on the inside of the door proved more durable than Fundy had expected.

"You know what would be nice right now?" he said to no one in particular. "A blowtorch, right on the ground in front of me. With fuel! A working blowtorch with fuel."

No dice. Fundy considered the chain of events that had led to the throwing knife in his hand, nicely weighted now that he considered it, and said, thinking out loud, "Another thing blowtorches can be used for, it just occurred to me, is explosions and skin melting–"

A blowtorch clattered to the floor in front of him. Fundy whooped, shot a guilty look at the camera watching his cell– weird that nobody had interfered so far, actually, what was up with that– and grabbed it to melt the hinges fast, kicking the door until it gave up the ghost and crashed into the hallway.

The empty hallway, free of responding henchmen or, in fact, anyone. Fundy heard alarms shrieking in the adjacent hallways, saw red lights blinking near the ceiling. The sound hadn't penetrated the soundproof cell.

"This isn't weird at all," Fundy told himself, hunching his shoulders and glancing around. "This is normal. This is usual for villain lairs."

He'd robbed too many of them to believe that, but that was a question for later Fundy. Current Fundy was looking neither gift escapes, gift knives, nor gift blowtorches in the mouth. He skulked forward, peering around corners before he darted to the next defensible position, and the halls stayed empty.

So the next thing to do was finding Wild Card. Fundy could do that. He had schematics– okay, he'd had schematics, but he also had a great memory, so he had them, present tense, in the sense that they remained within his brain– and now that he'd explored some of the base, he knew where he was within it. Interrogation rooms would be higher up in the floating ship, close to the surface so Whatsisname could threaten to throw prisoners over the side. He liked doing that, since his powers let him control air and he could sweep people back to the ship after scaring the shit out of them. Fundy knew this because he did his *research* and didn't have such a predictable routine that he could be scooped up by any villain on the street. Unlike some people, who harassed him with invitations to maid cafes and would otherwise remain unnamed.

The elevators looked risky, so Fundy took the stairs, pressing back beneath a flight of them when a pair of henchmen rushed down with weapons in hand. One of them was clutching an arm erupting with blue scales, flesh rippling in a way that flesh should never have rippled;

the other one seemed sort of fine, except she for sure had a concussion and kept banging into walls.

Neither of them so much as glanced at Fundy's hiding place. He darted out and flipped off the door they'd gone through, still pissy about the whole *beating up a helpless prisoner* thing, and scrambled upstairs before anyone else could come by.

There was black sludge spilled across the floor between Fundy and the next hallway. Fundy slowed, eyes flicking up to the cameras again– he was starting to doubt anyone cared enough to come after him, which meant that either a greater issue was happening or that he was walking face first into a trap, about to step on a tripwire like a fool stepping on a rake and getting smacked in the face– and it bubbled, shifting sideways into a mass that coalesced against the wall.

"Oh, what the fuck," Fundy yelped. He jerked back and brandished his blowtorch like a pistol. "Stay back! I have fire, I'm basically as well-armed as a, as a caveman, you do not want to mess with this!"

The sludge formed an arm, groping up the wall, leaving slug tracks with its malformed fingers. A mouth and nose twisted out of the goopy mess, burbling, splitting in two, teeth popping up in rows like floating corks and sliding apart, and Fundy fucking lost it. He ran and leaped, aiming for literally anywhere past the oil-slick-maybe-person, and a sticky arm lashed out and caught at his ankle– he slammed into the floor, bruised rib shrieking for justice– it gasped nonsense, groped at his ankle and *pulled him back*–

Fundy twisted and slashed at the arm with the knife, except it wasn't a knife anymore. It was a longer blade, like a machete but sharper, like the hero tech he'd seen that could slice stainless steel like melting butter, and it cut through the sludgy arm with insulting ease. Fundy got to his feet and bolted.

He bashed the keypads to the interrogation cells with a hammer that came out of nowhere, and the locks hissed open before the sparks stopped flying. "Come on, come on, come on," Fundy muttered, bouncing on his heels and casting twitchy glances over his shoulder. More cameras in this hall. Someone had to have noticed, someone would be on their way–

He yanked the door open. Hbomb jerked upright when he did, stumbling and catching himself with his upper arms as whatever head wound he'd acquired made itself known. That was an unfortunate amount of blood on his temple. A suboptimal amount of bruising, for a man of Hbomb's size. The bars of the cell bent wonderfully easily once Fundy applied his hydraulic rescue tool, which had fallen into his hands the moment he considered bludgeoning Hbomb over the head with them.

"Fun– Animus, I meant Animus?" Wild Card blurted, looking a lot more panicked than Fundy had thought he would. Fundy's fear spiked just from association, since if Wild Card was freaked out there was probably a reason for it, which he was missing– an important reason that might kill him very dead. "What are you doing here? When did you *get* here?"

"I," Fundy said indignantly, "have been here for *hours*, trying to save you! Like you asked me to using copious amounts of flattery! I fought a slime, Wild Card! It grabbed me! I barely escaped!"

"You beautiful, beautiful man," Hbomb said in great relief. Fundy glowered at him, then helped him through the mangled bars so he wouldn't careen into another wall. "Have you seen that, uh, that main guy here recently? The person whose base this is?"

The indignance grew. “You mean he talked to you? I never met him."

“I wouldn’t recommend the experience,” Hbomb informed him. “Are you feeling what I am? Not romance, not talking about romance, I’m talking about powers?”

Fundy faltered. “What about powers?”

“I can’t tell which one you have right now,” Hbomb said, and he sounded a little hysterical, which was weird because sounding hysterical was generally Fundy’s job. “I thought it was a suppressant drug, but that guy whose name we both forgot and/or never knew freaked out too because he could control air and then he couldn’t but he *was* shrinking and growing uncontrollably, and his second in command with the color change ability started throwing lava everywhere, and things got really, heh, heated, so–”

“Wait, wait, wait, is that why I haven’t been able to sense any animals? I thought this was just an oddly sterile environment, even free of rats and shit. This makes so much more sense.” Fundy thought about it for a moment, then snapped his fingers. “I will bet *money* that I traded powers with someone. Who do you know who can summon things but only if they can be used to hurt people?”

“Imp,” Hbomb said at once. “HOA member, kind of annoying, should probably be in school if we’re claiming to be responsible members of society.”

“You’re a part-time catmaid, you stopped being responsible ages ago,” Fundy retorted. He let go of Hbomb’s arm, eyeing him in case his balance took another nosedive. Hbomb wobbled and gave a thumbs-up.

“I still can’t believe you rank the catmaid stuff as *more* weird than the criminal activities,” he complained. “What else can you summon? Can you summon a ham?”

“Why would I do that? Why would I ever do that?”

“Close your eyes and imagine murdering someone with a frozen ham,” Hbomb suggested. “I always thought Imp’s power was fascinating, I’d love to analyze it in more detail– think *spiral sliced*. Think *honey glazed*.”

Fundy groaned. “I’m thinking I liked you better as a damsel in distress.”

Hbomb snickered.

Fundy’s getaway plan had included a pair of parachutes stashed by a Canada goose he’d briefly possessed– and *wow* were those some chaotic minds, he’d never look at pre-sliced white bread the same way again– but that plan required going back through the hallway with the sludge person, and anyway the supervillain who owned the base had probably found that shit by now.

Their next best bet was to steal one of the supervillain’s helicopters, which required going to the roof of the base and hoping for the best, but that plan crashed and burned as soon as they reached the airstrip.

Two of the helicopters had been melted to red-hot slag, fuel combusting freely in puddles around the flight deck. A couple of corpses laid a few feet from the entrance, burned unrecognizable and surrounded by warped metal. Several people faced off at the other end of the deck.

Something was going *down*, clearly.

“Shrinky guy’s the one on the left,” Hbomb muttered, sizing up the villains and tugging Fundy behind one of the helicopters’ remains. He yanked up his shirt collar and breathed through it, trying not to gag at the stench of burnt flesh. “I think, uh, lava lady’s obvious, she’s deducible from what we’ve been given, not sure about the others but one of them should have had ice powers if I’m recognizing that face as well as I should be? But not anymore, wow, I’m extraneous. Have I been phased out of the market?”

“That’s fucked up for you, I’m upgrading to a better product,” Fundy told him. Lava Lady had molten rock winding around her like a pair of pythons. Fundy clocked three guns, good luck with those, and a fourth weapon– maybe a laser gun? Individual villain tech? Whatever it was, it looked cool-- in the hands of a man shouting words that the great engines holding the base in the air carried away before Fundy could hear them. All of the villains were between them and the parachutes he’d stashed.

“They don’t see us,” he said, more of a prayer than a statement of fact. “They do *not* see us. We have no way out and we’re going to die, what the fuck, I hate my life.”

The sky stretched out around them, dizzyingly blue. The air was thin and dry and hurt his lungs to breathe. He could see the city in the distance, a grayish line of horizon, but closer was a roiling brown-black mirror, the surface of a lake Fundy had lived beside all his life. There was so much e.coli in those waters. So many floating plastic bottles. Fundy wished he was down by the boardwalk instead of up on a fuckoff huge villain base, but he couldn’t always get what he wanted, could he.

“Alright, this is doable,” Hbomb said. “Think about useful things. What could you kill a guy with besides a hang glider that also flies?”

“*Excuse* me?”

“Look, a hang glider doesn’t seem murderous enough, and they might notice a parachute!”

“You could strangle someone with a parachute, though,” Fundy argued.

“A parachute will go into the engines and chop us into culinarily useful bits if we try to jump off here,” Hbomb pointed out, and okay, yeah, that was a gruesome way to die that Fundy would prefer to avoid. “Consider a *fighter jet*.”

“You could shoot someone with a fighter jet,” Fundy tried. One of the people with guns was looking their way, making hand motions he did not like the vibes of. Their timeline for Fundy utilizing the power of his imagination to save the day was rapidly compressing to *seconds*. “You could use missiles! Run someone over! Run it into another fighter jet, I’m picturing it now, I can’t fly a jet but I’m picturing it now– they’re coming this way–”

“Let’s jump,” Hbomb said, higher. “Let’s just– I think we can– *shit*!”

Lava sprayed in their direction, eating holes in the floor and searing Fundy’s skin as Hbomb yanked him out of the way, rolled them behind another pile of slag. Bullets pinged the floor around them.

“Why can’t infighting last *longer*?” Hbomb demanded. “They should get back to that, alright, that’d make more sense. Do we look like threats to them?”

“We’re serving as a teambuilding exercise,” Fundy shrilled, and more lava sank into the metal beside them with a hellish hiss. His skin was starting to blister from the proximity. “Bad, bad, this is bad, we need to *go*–”

“On it,” Hbomb blurted, grabbing his hand and running for the side, and Fundy thought *chop them up with the engine crash it into their face drop them from up high and they were plummeting–*

It was weird, what happened next. The wind hit Fundy’s face like an eighteen-wheeler. He screamed. *Hbomb* screamed. He imagined a fighter jet as hard as he could, the sleek metal, the roar of the engine, the inside of the cockpit, and he swore he felt controls under his hands. He swore their fall leveled into a controlled glide, engine sputtering, jet hitting the lake with a spray of water and bobbing up, slamming Fundy’s head into the dashboard, Hbomb cursing beside him–

And the next thing he knew, he was lying on a smooth, rippling surface, staring at the shape of the floating base as it blocked the sun. His head pounded like it had been split open by a boulder. He licked his lips and tasted blood.

“Am I dead?” he said weakly. “I don’t want to be dead. That would be unfortunate if it happened before *Breath of the Wild 2* came out.”

“You’re not dead,” Hbomb said, sounding dazed. Fundy clambered upright and caught him staring at the palms of his hands where they touched the water, the currents emanating from where he connected. Hbomb flexed a finger and summoned droplets upwards to orbit them like planets. “You just passed out for a minute. Nice work with the jet, by the way! It disappeared, but it got the job done.”

The lake surface shifted under Fundy’s knees like the mat of a trampoline. In the distance, the city glimmered in a lovely display of severe, ecologically damaging light pollution. “Huh,” he said, and attempted to peer beneath the newly solid surface. “Do you think it sank? Also, whose power is that?”

“Nereid,” Hbomb said after a long moment, oddly hesitant. Fundy narrowed his eyes, sensing *secret knowledge*. Hbomb gave him a guileless look. “I think. What do you say you summon a boat and we get out of here?”

“I don’t know that I can,” Fundy said, blinking against the pressure in his skull. He wanted to lie down and sleep for *days*. Weeks, possibly. “That jet took a lot out of me.”

“Dang,” Hbomb said, and squinted up at the air base. An alarming plume of smoke was pumping out of one of its engines. “We should probably move, though. Are you able to walk?”

“Fuck you, what am I, a toddler?” Fundy snapped, struggling upright, and overbalanced. The water’s surface nearly bounced them both off their feet. He imagined hitting Hbomb over the head with a frozen ham, and a wrapped piece of meat fell between them and knocked them both down again with the ripples. “Oh, come on, why does *that* work but a boat doesn’t? Do you think it’s mass?”

“Complexity?” Hbomb suggested. “But then, organic matter is complex…” He flexed his hand, and a tube of water delivered the ham to him. “It *looks* edible."

“Good, we’ll have snacks for the journey,” Fundy grumbled. “Are you okay, H? No serious symptoms that will lead to death?”

“Not unless sudden new powers count,” Hbomb said, wobbling to his feet again, “and I’m feeling good about these. I could get used to this.”

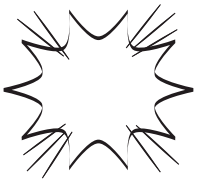
Fundy thought back to the weapons he’d called up, the sheer *possibilities* inherent in being able to summon any small object if you were creative enough. He took Hbomb’s offered hand and levered himself upright, stared across the lake at the city lights and distant docks. Everyone powered in the entire city could be having these problems. They would be confused, disconcerted, stupefied. Vulnerable to, say, being robbed by a guy with endless lockpicks and his friend who owed him a favor now.

Not to mention the people he could *show this off to*. The future sparkled with possibilities.

“You know what, H,” Fundy said, “I think this might be the best day of my life.”

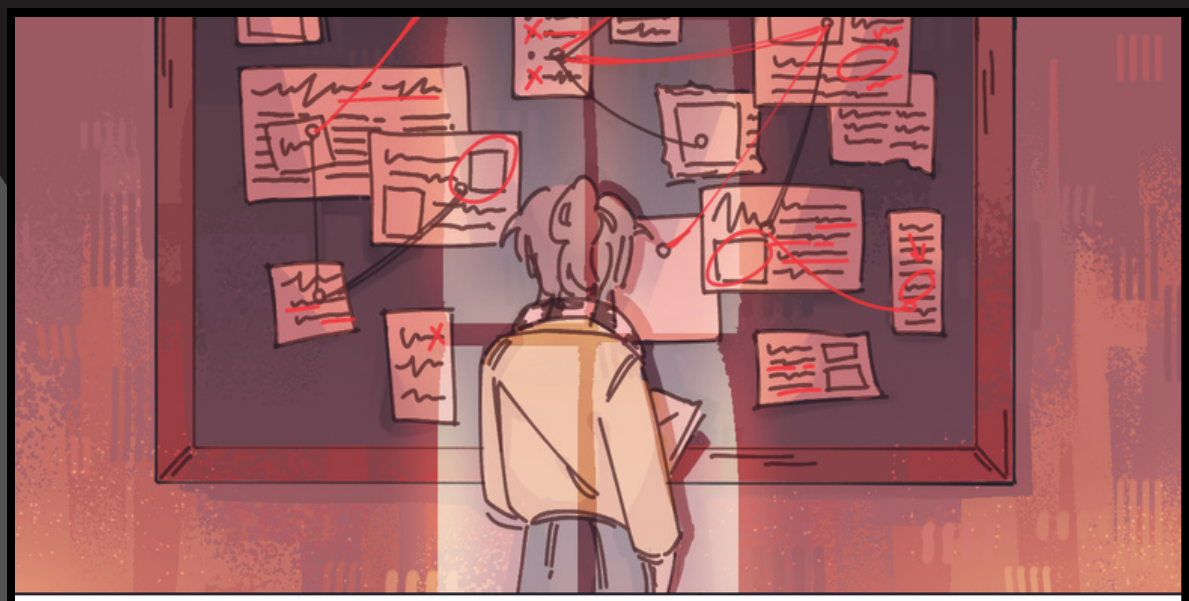
“I’d put it in my lowest five, personally,” Hbomb mused, forming a ball of water into the shape of a hand and then a rubber duck. “*Maybe* an honorable mention for cool water powers.”

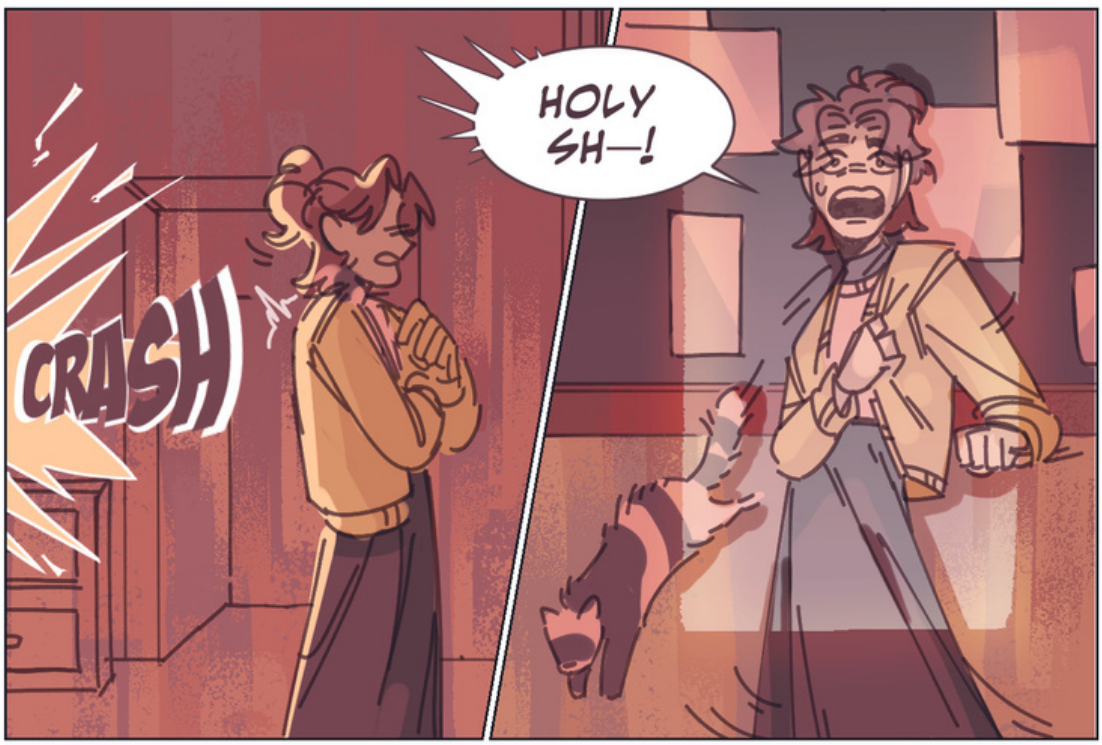
“Shut up and carry the ham,” Fundy told him beatifically, and set off on the long, long walk to shore.



Creators: Warn & Shara

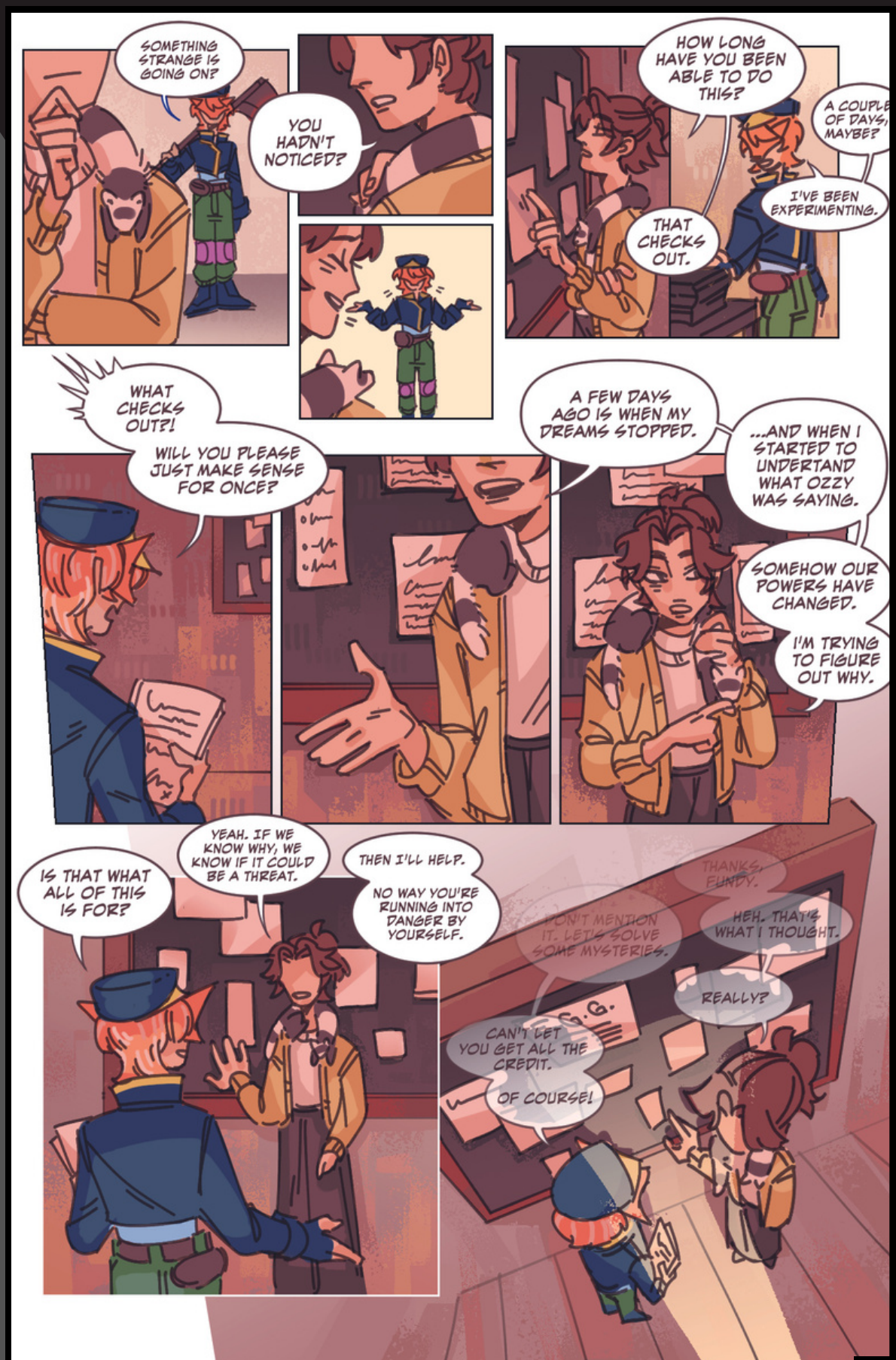
WANTED
NAME: ANIMUS
WANTED FOR: PETTY THEFT, BURGLARY




HOLY SH—!
CRASH!

STUMBLE
NAILED IT!
FUNDY?!
PRAY TELL WHY YOU FELT THE NEED TO COME IN THROUGH MY WINDOW?
...THIS TIME?
ACTUALLY-
SORRY ABOUT THE WINDOW, BY THE WAY-
I CAN SUMMON THIS THING NOW, SO I WANTED TO TRY IT OUT.
I CAN SUMMON ALL KINDS OF COOL STUFF!
WHAT?

YEAH! GUNS,
SPEARS,
SWORDS,
HAVEN'T TRIED A BAZOOKA YET BUT I CAN PROBABLY MAKE IT WORK.
IT DOESN'T EVEN HAVE TO BE REAL!
I SAW THIS IN A VIDEO GAME!
SINCE WHEN-
WAIT, ANYTHING?
YUP!
WHAT ABOUT THE BUSTER SWORD?
VOILA!
OH SHIT-
FUMBLES
I KNEW SOMETHING STRANGE WAS GOING ON...
BUT SOMEHOW, I DIDN'T EXPECT THIS.


SOMETHING STRANGE IS GOING ON?
YOU HADN'T NOTICED?
HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO DO THIS?
A COUPLE OF DAYS, MAYBE?
I'VE BEEN EXPERIMENTING.
THAT CHECKS OUT.
WHAT CHECKS OUT?!
WILL YOU PLEASE JUST MAKE SENSE FOR ONCE?
A FEW DAYS AGO IS WHEN MY DREAMS STOPPED.
...AND WHEN I STARTED TO UNDERTAND WHAT OZZY WAS SAYING.
SOMEHOW OUR POWERS HAVE CHANGED.
I'M TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHY.
IS THAT WHAT ALL OF THIS IS FOR?
YEAH. IF WE KNOW WHY, WE KNOW IF IT COULD BE A THREAT.
THEN I'LL HELP.
NO WAY YOU'RE RUNNING INTO DANGER BY YOURSELF.
THANKS, FUNDY.
DON'T MENTION IT. LET'S SOLVE SOME MYSTERIES.
HEH. THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT.
REALLY?
CAN'T LET YOU GET ALL THE CREDIT.
OF COURSE!

Creator: Mikastis

Creator: Erzech

WARDEN

Creators: Cherry & Sparks

VOLUME 4:

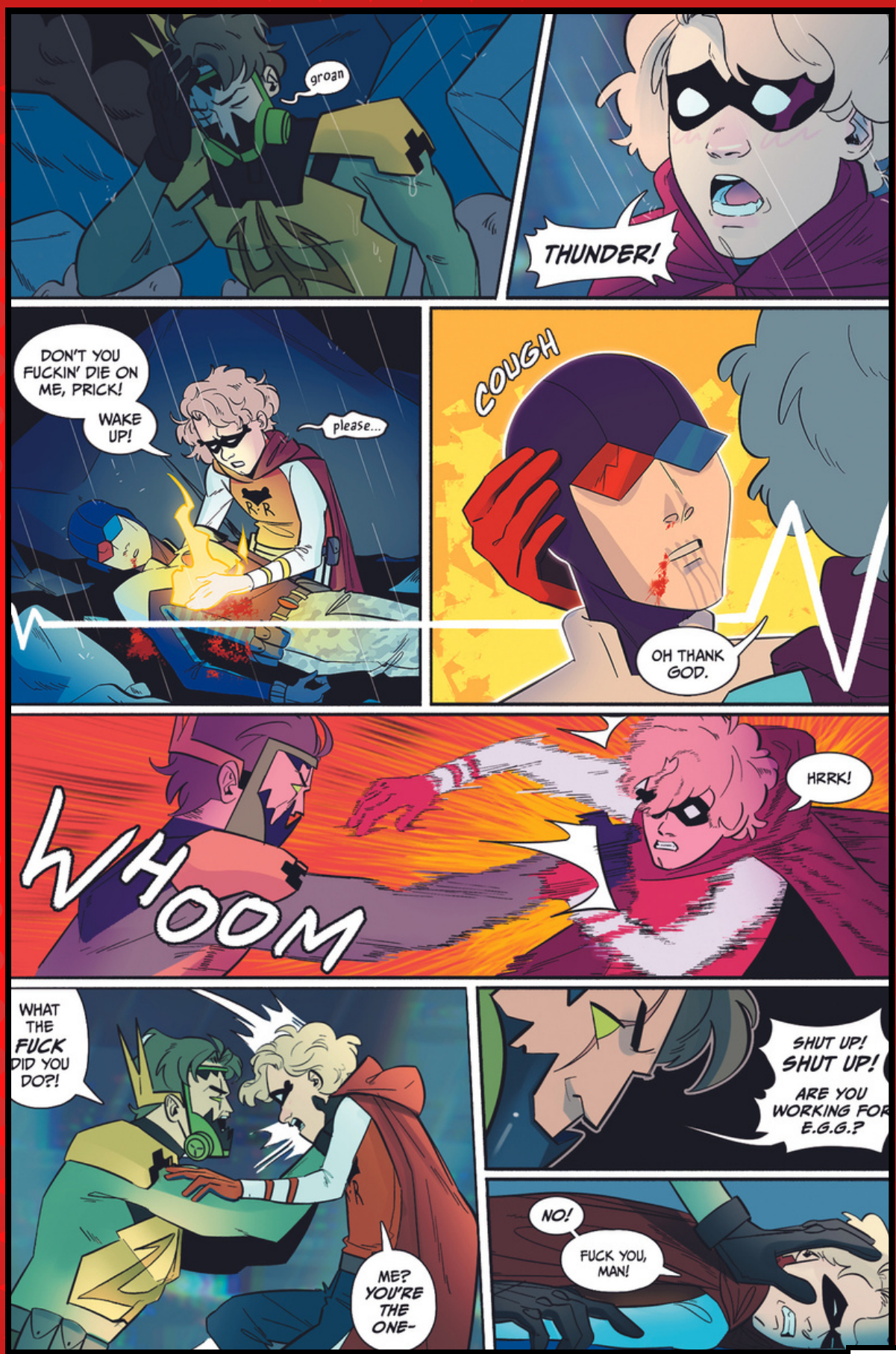
TRUTH

TOMMY INNIT
CODENAME: RED RACCOON
STATUS: VIGILANTE
ORIGINAL POWER: ANIMAL SPEAKING
NEW POWER: NECROMANCY
SHOULDN'T YOU BE TRYING TO ESCAPE, CRIMINAL?
WHY WOULD I RUN FROM YOU?
JACK MANIFOLD
CODENAME: THUNDER
STATUS: HOA HERO
ORIGINAL POWER: POWER MIMCRY
NEW POWER: SUPERSONIC VOICE
OK RUDE. I'M VERY INTIMIDATING.
MEMEME MY NAME IS THUNDER, WHICH IS STUPID, BY THE WAY!
YOUR NAME DOESN'T EVEN MAKE FUCKIN' SENSE!
YOU SUCK. AND BESIDES, YOU LIKE ME.
ACTUALLY, MY NAME MAKES SENSE NOW-
SPLASH!
SHIT!
THUNDER, WHY AREN'T YOU ATTEMPTING TO TAKE IN THIS... VIGILANTE?

Creator: BeckyBlah

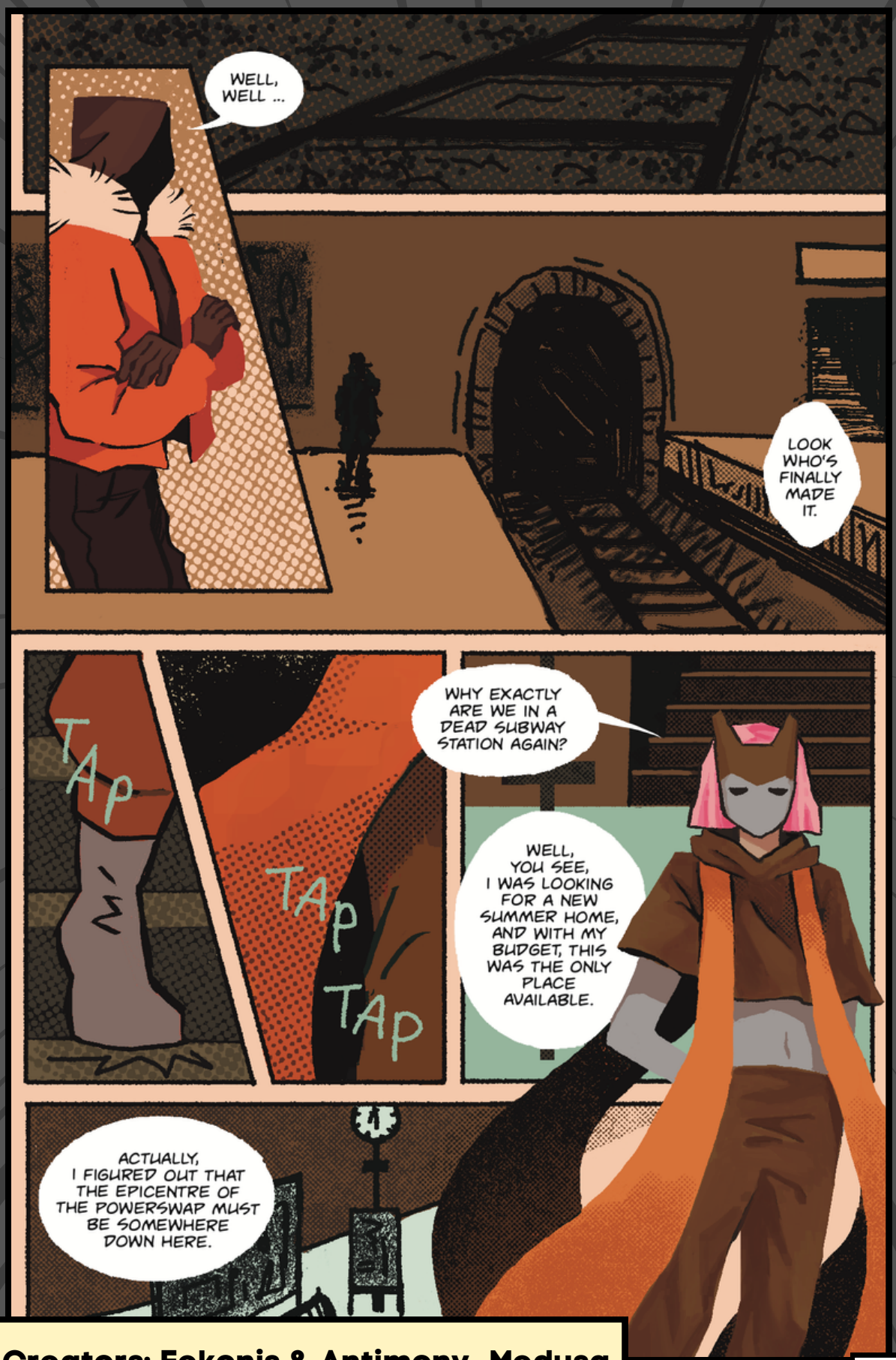
NO MATTER.
SAM AWESAMDUDE
CODENAME: WARDEN
STATUS: HOA HERO
ORIGINAL POWER: TECHNOMANCY
NEW POWER: COMPEL TRUTH
IF THUNDER WON'T TAKE YOU IN, I WILL.
AND LOOK - NO FURRY NUISANCES TO SAVE YOU THIS TIME.
NOW TELL ME, RED RACCOON...
ARE YOU WORKING FOR E.G.G.?
WHO?
UNHF
WHAT THE FUCK, MAN!?
THUNK
CRACK!

FUCK'S SAKE, MAN! STOP!
YOU'RE GOING TO KILL HIM!
WARDEN!
STOOOOOOOOP!!
OH, SHIT.
FWOOMM
EURGH...

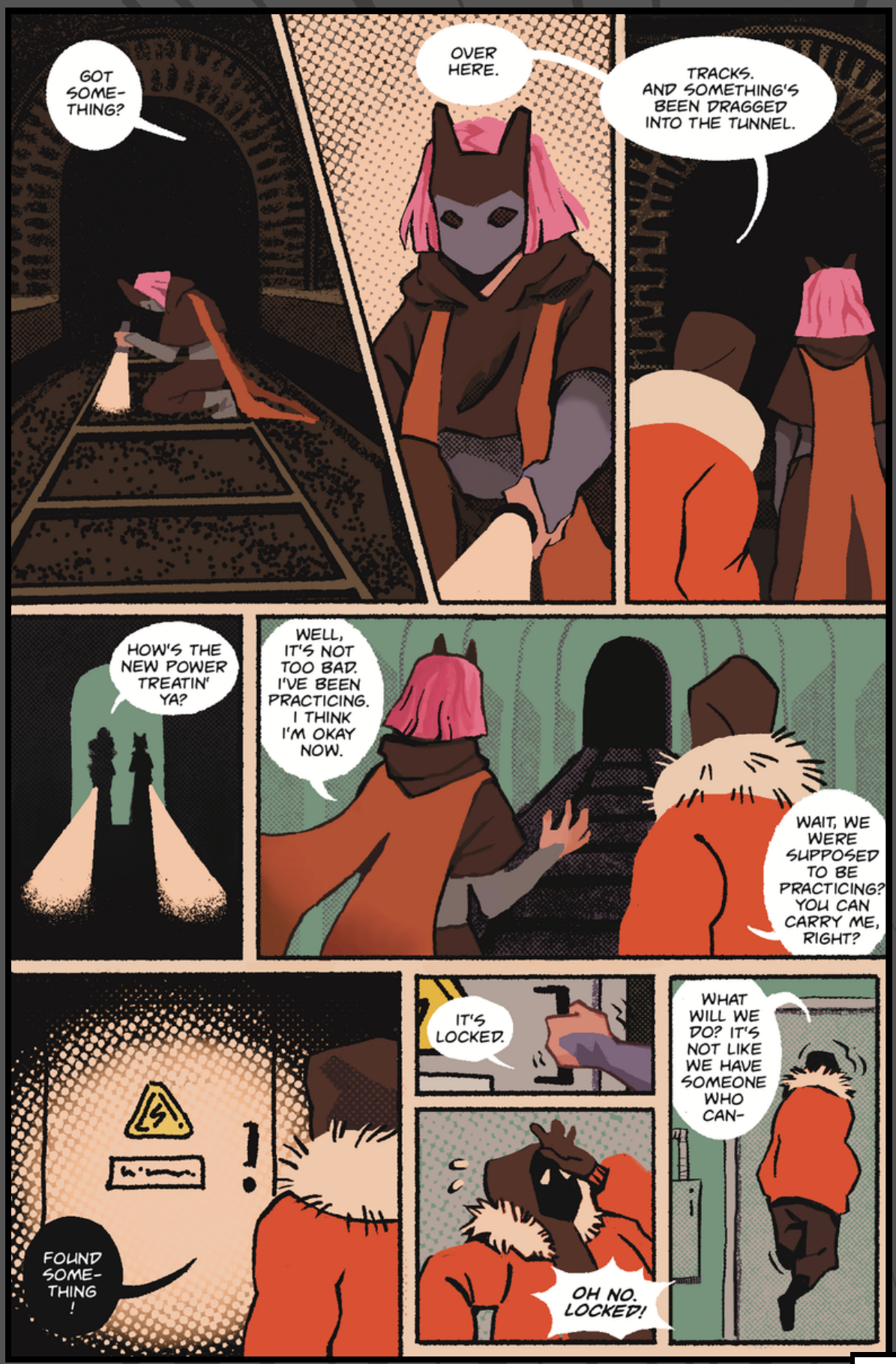

groan
THUNDER!
DON'T YOU FUCKIN' DIE ON ME, PRICK!
WAKE UP!
please...
COUGH
OH THANK GOD.
WHOOM
HRRK!
WHAT THE FUCK DID YOU DO?!
ME? YOU'RE THE ONE-
SHUT UP! SHUT UP! ARE YOU WORKING FOR E.G.G.?
NO!
FUCK YOU, MAN!

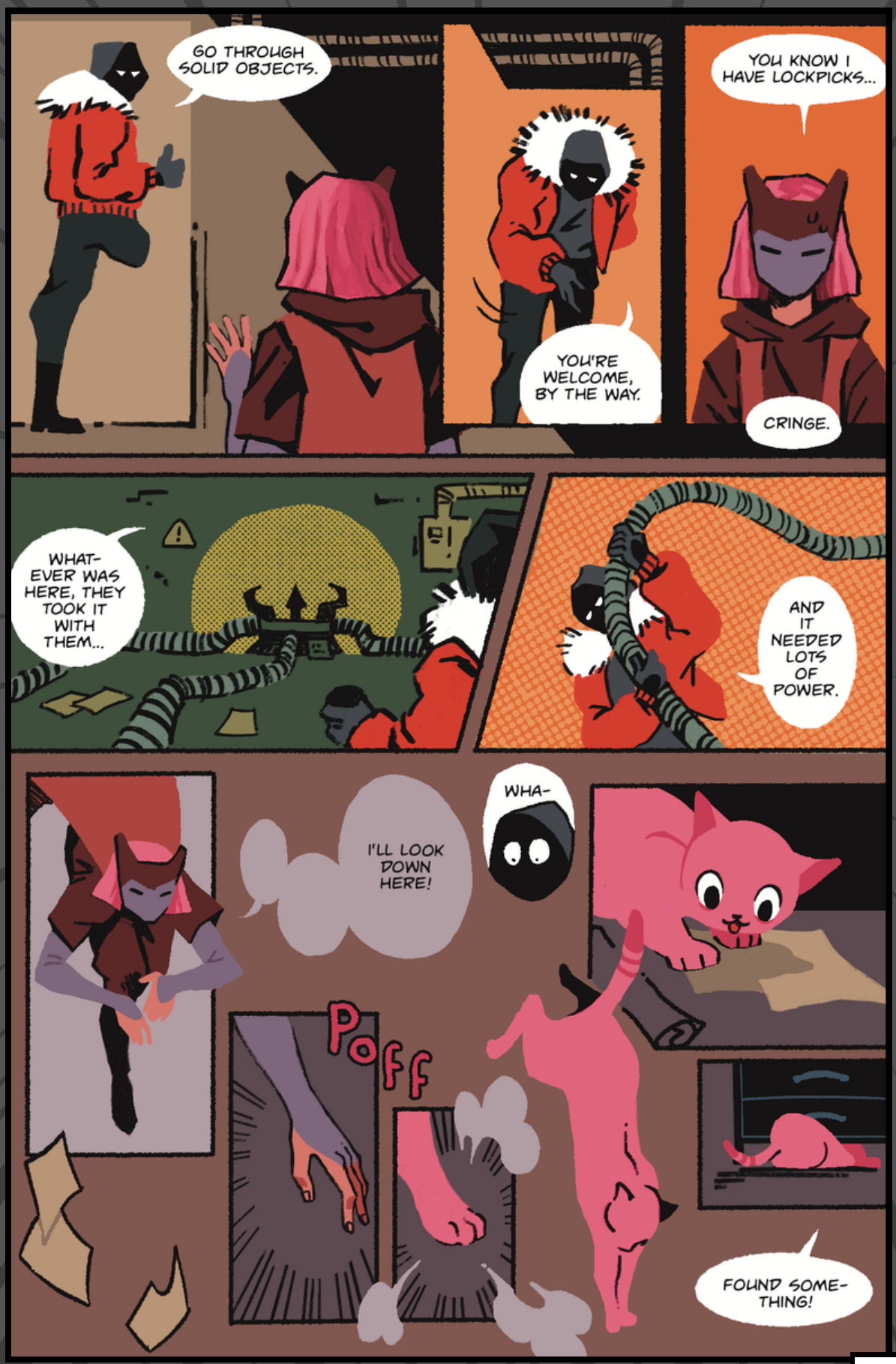
WHO ARE YOU!?
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
TOMMY!
FUCK YOU! YOUR NEW POWER IS SHIT!
...TOMMY?
TAKE OFF YOUR MASK.
TAKE IT OFF!
FUCK YOU! NO!
FINE. THEN I WILL.
STOP! NO!
NO... TOMMY?
NO, NO, NO! I DID THIS FOR YOU!
I DID EVERYTHING FOR YOU!
JUST... LEAVE.
TAKE THUNDER AND LEAVE.

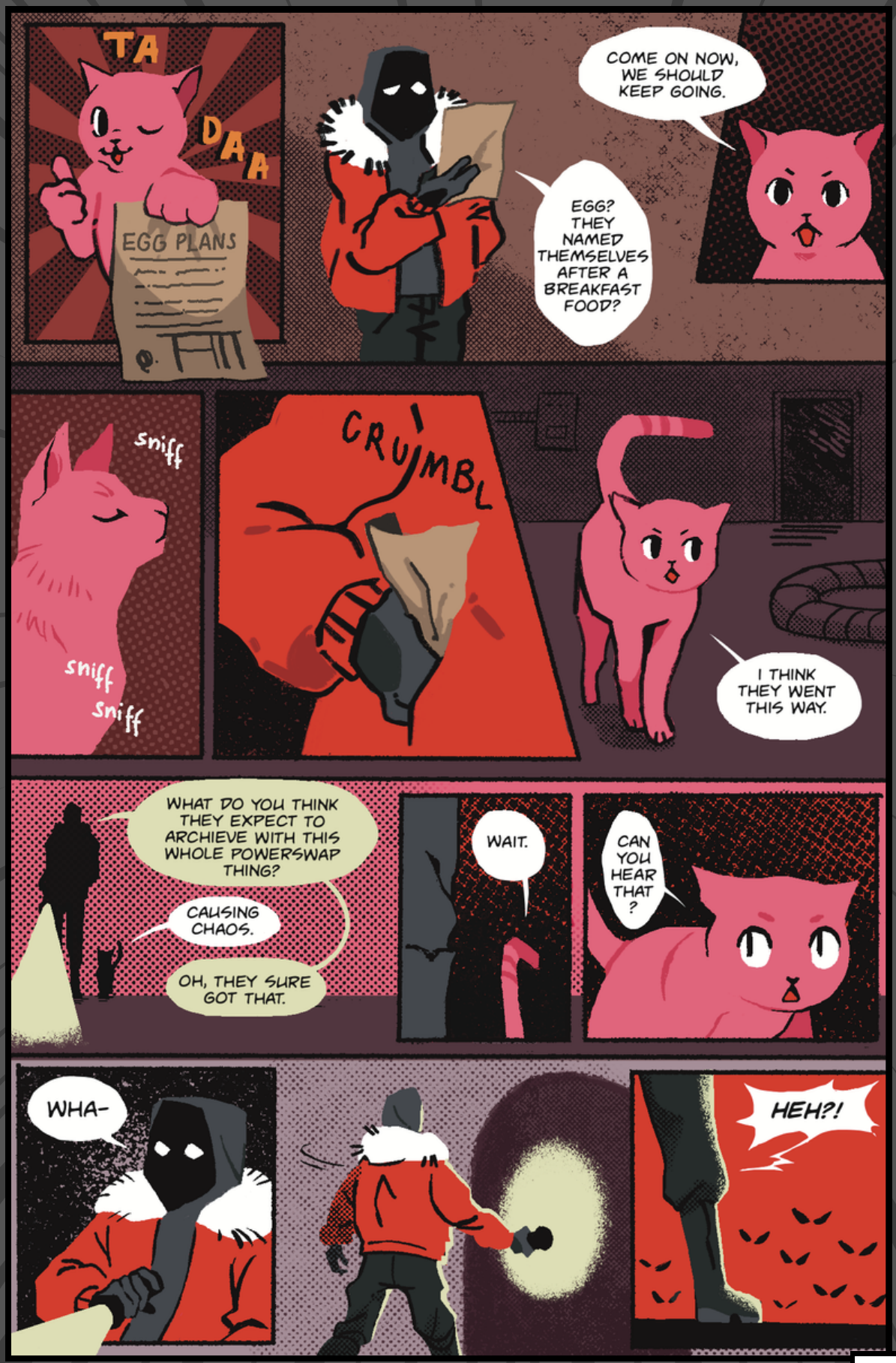
FUCK YOU. YOU'RE A PIECE OF SHIT AND A BASTARD, AND I HATE YOU.
A REAL HERO WOULD NEVER HAVE DONE THIS.
R·R
PLEASE...
YOU WERE GOING TO KILL ME.
R·R
YOU'RE AS BAD AS ANY VILLAIN.
FIN.


WELL, WELL ...
LOOK WHO'S FINALLY MADE IT.
TAP
TAP
TAP
WHY EXACTLY ARE WE IN A DEAD SUBWAY STATION AGAIN?
WELL, YOU SEE, I WAS LOOKING FOR A NEW SUMMER HOME, AND WITH MY BUDGET, THIS WAS THE ONLY PLACE AVAILABLE.
ACTUALLY, I FIGURED OUT THAT THE EPICENTRE OF THE POWERSWAP MUST BE SOMEWHERE DOWN HERE.

Creators: Eekonis & Antimony_Medusa


GOT SOME-THING?
OVER HERE.
TRACKS. AND SOMETHING'S BEEN DRAGGED INTO THE TUNNEL.
HOW'S THE NEW POWER TREATIN' YA?
WELL, IT'S NOT TOO BAD. I'VE BEEN PRACTICING. I THINK I'M OKAY NOW.
WAIT, WE WERE SUPPOSED TO BE PRACTICING? YOU CAN CARRY ME, RIGHT?
FOUND SOME-THING!
IT'S LOCKED.
OH NO. LOCKED!
WHAT WILL WE DO? IT'S NOT LIKE WE HAVE SOMEONE WHO CAN-


GO THROUGH SOLID OBJECTS.
YOU'RE WELCOME, BY THE WAY.
YOU KNOW I HAVE LOCKPICKS...
CRINGE.
WHAT-EVER WAS HERE, THEY TOOK IT WITH THEM...
AND IT NEEDED LOTS OF POWER.
I'LL LOOK DOWN HERE!
WHA-
POFF
FOUND SOME-THING!


TA DAA
EGG PLANS
COME ON NOW, WE SHOULD KEEP GOING.
EGG? THEY NAMED THEMSELVES AFTER A BREAKFAST FOOD?
sniff
sniff
sniff
CRUMBL
I THINK THEY WENT THIS WAY.
WHAT DO YOU THINK THEY EXPECT TO ARCHIEVE WITH THIS WHOLE POWERSWAP THING?
CAUSING CHAOS.
OH, THEY SURE GOT THAT.
WAIT.
CAN YOU HEAR THAT?
WHA-
HEH?!

...
GRRR!
OH THESE GUYS EAT PEOPLE ALIVE, DON'T THEY?
SWOOO!
GASP!
HISS!
TOLD YA I NEEDED SOMEONE TO CARRY ME.
OH, YOU WOULD'VE BEEN FINE.
SINCE WE FOUND THE PLANS WE CAN LEAVE THROUGH HERE!

YOU DON'T WANNA FOLLOW THIS LEAD ANY FURTHER?!!
BEEP BEEP
NAH, WE WOULD BE OUTNUMBERED ANYWAYS.
PLUS I GOTTA GET TO MY OTHER JOB THAT PAYS EVEN BETTER THAN BEIN' A VIGILANTE.
MC PUFFY'S
PUFFY
I MIGHT HAVE SOMETHING YOU'LL BE INTERESTED IN TAKING A LOOK AT.
...

Creator: yyorkwest

Creator: Apatura Iris

With Thunderous Applause and An Encore

Creator: bandanabiel

CW: Mild body horror

Like an animal, his jaw stretches and cracks, gaping maw making space for a new beast. It claws and kicks and charges from his lungs, an explosive force which scatters birds and spooks the trees. His body bends, curls down on itself, heaving with the effort of an effect he can't fully hear.

He must have been screaming a full minute.

It's gotta be some sort of physiological change, Jack's decided, that accompanied the Switch to suit his body for the new power. There's no way he'd be able to stand this otherwise.

The world around him is muffled but for a high-sung ringing. His very teeth buzz, numbing his face with frequency. In front of him, the forest sways with sonic force. When he's done, the echoes will shout back at him from the mountains, and even they will be deafening. But in this moment, there is only this. Only now.

All power has a limit, though, and Jack soon meets his. Diaphragm presses and compresses his core, bowing himself like a willow as every last drop of breath is squeezed from him. Coughs a little, covering his mouth politely despite being in the middle of bum-fuck nowhere. Checks his watch.

A minute and thirty some seconds. Fuckin' hell.

He laughs, "*Hah!*", then gags. Each heaving breath feels just hairs away from a retch. He steadies his hands against equally trembling knees and slowly, like pulling a boat to dock, drags himself to the fallen log he's claimed as his.

This was once a popular spot, Jack supposes. There are marks on its flesh, carved by children and romantics. *Simon was here, and KR loves PW, and Soares Family Trip 2010.* Jack tries to focus on them, between the warping waves of nausea.

It's hard. It hurts. It's frightening, a little.

When his mouth stops salivating, he starts a new timer. Maybe twenty minutes of rest.

Carefully, he holds back another gag. Won't do to puke again.

There's a world record out there for "longest shout." Last Jack had Googled (about a minute and thirty some seconds ago), he's just broken it by double. See, this is what Vehement should've been doing with his powers. Using the increased lung capacity to demolish a record set by some random civilian at a radio station. See if anyone could top him, now. Here he comes, BBC.

He could also go back to Headquarters– they've got all sorts of testing equipment, sensors and stabilizers and scientists– but he's on holiday, so far as they know. In the wilds like this, with trees stretching and animals scattering and only when he's done can he hear the echoes, he's kind of. Well.

It's almost peaceful. Mimic couldn't do anything like this.

(A lie. Mimic could do exactly this. In the name, innit?)

(Still.)

Despite himself and his self-dismissive thought pattern, a smile tugs at Jack's lip. It's proud and real and the kind Niki pulled out of him best.

(Nereid and Thunder, Niki and Jack. The only regret Jack has about this sabbatical is not waiting to tell Niki where he was going.)

There is a nobility in backup. Yeah, he's overlooked, and he doesn't have a huge merch line, and fans aren't lining up to watch his battles or cheer him on or be an open opportunity for hostages and collateral. Boo-fuckin'-hoo. But Jack's the best in the backup game, and anyone would be a fool to miss out on him and Mimic!

Oh, there's a fire downtown? Oh, you have a hero headed over with water manipulation? Don't you want two? What do you want Jack for?
Oh, your team's down a person, they've got the flu? Don't worry, Jack'll fill the gaps. What do you want him to be?

What do you want Jack to be?

He can be anything you want.

Jack of All Trades, he thought his hero name'd be.

Instead, he thinks as he takes slow, careful sips of water from the canteen swung 'round his hip, they'd called him Thunder. As in, "the thing that happens after lightning." "The shutting of a door, after someone louder and brighter has passed through it." "That which comes second." (Not that coming second is really an issue, in fact, it's a rather considerate thing to do!)

Before he could change it, every news station had caught on. That's what he gets for waiting 'til after his debut to declare himself.

The world is quiet, now. Not from the soundproofing that goes on in his head when he uses his powers, just from the stillness of the forest. Everything that could've been scampering around here has scampered off.

Jack thinks perhaps, in light of recent events, his name fits him better.

In light of recent events…

He looks down, and his reflection looks up. The one below, the one in the black mirror, is just like Jack. Its symmetry is perfect to the most minute detail. The rubble in his hair, the brokenness of his body. The blood down his front. There is, however, one small difference: the Jack in the mirror is smiling. The one above most certainly is not.

… he might be considering a career change.

His water bottle runs dry, and his car is waiting at the end of this trail. Maybe it's best he waits 'til morning for round nine.

He walks while the sun sets, contemplating powers, the roles they come with, the rules everyone must follow, and the potential intricacies of submitting a new record to the folks at Guiness. Big man thoughts, as someone would say. He's impressed by his own endurance and feels confident in his ability to drive without vomiting by the time his car comes into view.

Sitting on the hood of his Sedan is a small, pink cat.

Or something that could probably pass as a cat, if someone had a cat, handed their child some scissors, and left the room.

It sleeps peacefully in the last rays of sun, clearly beloved by its sweater if not by its presence ten kilometers from the nearest service station. Jack taps his knuckles against the metal, perhaps more politely than a cat deserves.

"Scram," he says.

It opens one eye, and then the other. Then it scrambles to its paws, jumping to the roof of the vehicle to be eye-level with him.

"Jack!" it shouts.

Jack screams, and the earth startles with him.

The cat yowls, too, this time like a *proper fucking cat* and not a human person, and goes flying from the force of his shout. Thankfully he's all screamed-out from his cathartic scream sesh in the woods, or the cat would be fuckin' mist.

"Holy shit!" says Jack. He doesn't realize he'd fallen over himself until he's picking himself back up. "Holy shit, what the fuck."

"Ow," groans the cat. "You know," it says in its tiny, high voice, "maybe you need to be more level-headed for a power like that? Less… jumpy?"

"Well, maybe cats need to not fuckin' talk to me!" he barks back. Despite himself, his hero instincts dictate he rush over to make sure it's not horribly injured.

"What?" the cat asks. It tilts its head this way and that, and when Jack picks it up from where it's lying in the grass, its little legs wobble. "Sorry, say that again?"

Jesus. Hopefully it's not permanent damage. First day really testing his new powers and he deafens a kitty cat, that's some heroic shit, right there. Probably would be a whole citation from the HOA, fuck him.

Its body is small and soft in Jack's hands. Not completely hairless, like he'd first assumed. Instead, it's sparsely fluffed and unfortunately skin-pink. A raw chicken tender of a cat.

"You're a weird one, aren't you?" he asks. Carefully, sits himself right on the ground and puts the thing in his lap, hands turned to keep the little guy facing him and from flopping over, in case it decides to die on him or something shitty.

It narrows its eyes into slits. "I think you just called me weird, but I can't be sure when everything's ringing. That's very rude of you, Jack."

Jack narrows his eyes back. It's not as effective as the cattishly sharp expression on the weird creature's face, but despite popular belief, Jack's not dense. He lifts it to his face, arms extended in case it suddenly chooses violence.

Slowly, so it can read his lips, he mouths, "Who are you?"

"Don't you recognize me?" it asks. Its whiskers lift in a very human expression, needley teeth glinting. It might be ill-fitting on a cat's anatomy, but Jack recognizes a smile when he sees one. "It's me! It's Niki!"

He nearly drops the cat.

"Jack!" she yelps. "Do *not!* Do *not* throw me again!"

"Would be hard to, at this point! Your fucking *claws* are in my hands, let *go, let go, let go!"*

"Stop throwing me! Say you won't throw me, Jack! I am warning you, I will scratch! Don't shout, you'll throw me!"

"You *already are*— Oh my god, I won't, please stop scratching me, I just want to put you down!"

Her yowls grow into full-blown caterwauling. "Did you just say you're gonna *put me down*? I'm not a cat! It's me, Niki! *Friends don't euthanize friends, Jack!*"

By the time Niki's hearing comes back, and Jack manages to assure Niki that he won't toss her, she's giggling like it's a game. Which, Jack supposes, it is a pretty funny situation to be in. He's never been able to stay upset when Niki's laughing, even when she is actively maiming him. She's his best friend, after all.

"Freedom!" she teases, once out of his grasp. Niki hops back onto the car, then onto the roof. She looks at him expectantly.

Jack follows her up and sits, cross-legged. The car dips under his weight while he climbs, but not significantly. He can see why she'd been napping there. It's a vibe.

"Hey, if anything, you were the one holding me captive," he grins. "How'd you even find me out here? I've been on leave, I don't think I told even you where I was going! I kind of got, uh…"

Smashed. Squashed. Made into a silly little pop-up Pollock, spread across the ground, turned 2-D.

I kind of died and found hell to be an obsidian lake. I kind of stood on its surface and stared down at the devil. And the devil kind of looked like me, and smiled up at me with my own face, and asked which of us was the false image, and now I'm kind of processing it by doing a bit of yelling in the woods. Also, if I quit the HOA, would you be interested in joining me?

"I got hurt," he finishes, lamely. One arm comes up to grasp the other. His chest tightens. He'll tell her the whole truth later, he decides. For right now, though— "What's been up with you, though, how about you?"

"I've been a cat," Niki says.

Jack blinks. “Cool.”

ust, you know.” Her tail swishes. “Cat things. Chasing string, chewing on cell phone chargers.”

“And getting little sweaters put on you?”

“And getting little sweaters on me!” She smiles her odd smile, then spins a bit to show off her knitwear. It is a very cute sweater. “This was a gift from a friend, actually!”

“Sheesh,” he notes appreciatively. “This cat’s drippy as hell.”

“Drippiest cat in the city!”

“Drippiest cat in the middle of nowhere,” he corrects. “What are you doing here?”

She lifts up a paw and starts licking it. Probably to get the blood out from between her claws. “I was in the area. Heard you got the shouty powers, so when I heard someone being shouty, I came to find you!”

In the area? Jack squints. “What do you mean, you were ‘in the area?’ There’s no one around for miles, that’s why I was out here.”

She freezes. (In typical cat fashion, perhaps, she forgets to put her tongue back.)

Jack leans in. “C’mon, Niki,” he coaxes. “You’re my best friend. You can tell me anything, remember?”

Visibly, Niki hesitates. “Anything?” she asks.

“You know everything about me, just about,” he reminds her. “You know where I live, and how I take my tea, and my origin story, and even about how—” he swallows, and looks around like the HOA has the trees bugged. “Er, how *uncertain* I’ve been about staying in the HOA. You *know* me. Of course you can tell me anything,” he promises. He means it, too, which makes it kind of weird when she takes a deep breath and follows up with:

“Okay, so, I might have lied about just being in the area.”

Which is not the bad part. Jack had doubted that to be the truth anyway.

“I’ve actually been trying to find you for a bit. I’ve been collecting a couple allies, and I need your help with— uh. Doing. Something.” Every addition lowers her ears a degree. “Something big. About the Swap. With… some people.” Then, her ears flatten to her skull. “The Syndicate?”

“Okay,” says Jack. “Jesus.” Which is a step up from his previous reactions to surprising information, isn’t it?

“I’m in the Syndicate,” Niki clarifies, which, yeah, actually, Jack wouldn’t have assumed that without being told outright. Hadn’t even assumed an association, until now. “I’m Nemesis.”

The vigilante. “Right,” says Jack. “And, um. How long have you been Nemesis?”

“Since the start,” she says. “Since… a while.”

“Right,” Jack sighs. “Right, right, right. Um, okay. Give me a second.”
Give him a second. Something inside feels like it’s caving in. Confusion? Sure. Betrayal? Is this a betrayal?

“Jack?”

A unique cocktail of emotions, all complicated and swirled-up like dust. Dust and debris. Huge chunks of concrete, rebar, asphalt.

“Jack, are you okay?”

“I know, I am, just—“

The competing roars of headrush and skyfall.

“Jack?”

He whips back around to her. “Sorry, I thought you were giving me a second.”

Niki’s stood up, like she’d been about to approach him, but she takes a step back now. Her head ducks down and her tail swishes low. Hurt looks different on a cat, but the expression that crosses her face is universal. “Sorry?”

“Sorry, no, it’s just—“ He screws up his face a little, tries to find the words for this weird, new hurt. “I just told you that I tell you everything, and that you’re my best friend, and now you’ve got this whole double life and I never really knew you?”

“Well, no,” Niki says. “That’s not at all what I said. I— I thought you said I could tell you anything? I know this is, like, a pretty big secret, and I’m sorry I’ve kept this from you for so long, but I’m telling you now because you wanted me to tell you—“

“Well, maybe I wanted you to want to tell me sooner,” which is convoluted, but it’s the closest he can get to how he feels. “This is heavy shit, Niki. I thought you were gonna be like, ‘Oh, hey Jack, I’ve been opening a secret bakery in the woods,’ not, ‘Oh, hey Jack, official HOA-affiliated hero, I’m a lawbreaker.’ I thought you were cottagecore?”

“I’m also an anarchist!” Niki meows. “I have layers, Jack!”

“Of course you’re also secretly an anarchist.”

“That part wasn’t secret.”

“Yeah, okay, that’s fair,” Jack says. “Yeah. Just… Fuck. Christ. Jesus fucking Christ. Okay.” Okay. He chews the inside of his cheek and gathers himself before spitting out his next question. “The Swap?”

“We think we can fix it,” Niki explains. Her paws curl nervously, one after the other, like she’s trying to dig through his car. “It might be hard, though, and I’d— I’d love for you to be there.”

Jack presses his fingers against his eyes, hard enough he sees stars. “Niki, I don’t want to work for your vigilante friends.”

“But we’re a team. Nereid and Thunder?” She waits a beat, expectant.

Jack makes her wait as long as he can. Then, he sighs. “Niki and Jack,” he finishes for her.

“Except… maybe it’s always been Niki and the Syndicate. And Jack is also there. Just like Jack’s always just been there.” Those last words slip past his lips more like acid than poison, burning his tongue and dribbling down his chin.

“Jack,” Niki sighs, but he can’t stop with all this momentum he’s built up.

“And on top of that,” he stumbles forward, “everything’s been so up in the air since the Swap, and now that I’ve finally started to find my footing, you’re all going to change it again? I don’t know if I could handle that again! And you don’t even know if it’s going to work! What if you make everything worse?”

“We’re not alone, Jack,” Niki insists. “We won’t be alone if we stick together, and if we stick together we can fix this for everyone—!”

“No, *you’re* not alone!” Jack snaps. His hands come up to drag down his face, pulling at his features. “You’ve got, like, this whole secret society or whatever, and I don’t even— I don’t even have Mimic, right now. And if I work with the Syndicate, then I might not even have the HOA, and I still don’t know *who I am,* Niki! Except now I know I’m apparently nobody’s best friend, the way I’ve known I’m nobody’s first choice for teams, or favorite hero, or—!”

Before he can say anymore, or maybe work his stress up into a scream, or maybe yank at his cheeks until he’s *sure* he isn’t smiling, a little paw presses over his lips.

He looks down and sees Niki. Small and pink and determined, and a little like she’s going to kick his ass.

“Jack,” says Niki, dead serious. “Are you mad because I have friends other than you?”

Jack pauses. Considers it. “I… guess?”

“Cringe.” Fucking roast him, he supposes. Her face is as flat as one with a muzzle can be. “You don’t have to be anyone’s best *anything* to be important.”

“I *know* that,” Jack says, and he does. It’s fucking… stupid, and cheesey, and he *knows* that. Intellectually speaking.

“You’re important, Jack,” Niki repeats.

“I know.”

“You’re *important*, Jack! You are!”

“I know!”

“Then stop having an inferiority complex, Jack!” Niki shouts, two paws on his knee and up in his face. Suddenly, her voice turns soft. “Oh. Oh, did I go too far? Please don’t cry, Jack, I didn’t mean for you to cry.”

“I’m not crying!” Jack bites. Even as he says it, though, something cold slips down his cheek. His eyes burn and his face is hot— it feels like rage. He wishes it felt like rage. It doesn’t.

Hurriedly, he swipes it away, fists tight as they pull across his cheeks.

He’s going to puke. He’s going to scream. He’s going to melt in embarrassment, why won’t his devil-self take him now?

“But it’s okay, Jack!” she insists. Her paws start going again against his jeans— kneading, this time. Comfort. Jack tries to time his hiccupy breath to each prickle. “It’s okay. We can figure it out together.”

Her pupils are blown wide in the dusk, expression earnest. They catch the moon and the stars, born again in the new night, and the image of Jack.
Its symmetry is perfect, to the most minute detail. And in his expression, he…

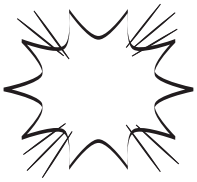
He looks scared.

“It’s okay,” Niki repeats. Soothes.

Jack’s eyes slip shut. Carefully, deliberately, he fills his lungs with breath. Feels something settle beneath his ribcage, which creaks along the parts still smarting from the memory of being crushed.

When he opens his eyes again, he thinks he looks brave.

“Okay,” he tells Niki. He isn’t sure what he’s agreeing to, yet. He’ll figure it out, when he gets a minute. “Okay,” he says.



Static, Static, Static

Creator: amaranthinecanicular

CW: Blood, implied suicide

Sapnap is menacing two burglars when the city comes crashing down on him, and the city is nothing but static, static, static.

When he manages to force his brain to be a brain again instead of a screaming knot of electricity, the owner of the nearly-burgled apartment is sitting beside him on the curb, instructing him how to breathe and when. In like this. Out like this. Slower, through your nose. Good, just like that. Do you have a history of migraines or panic attacks? She's a nurse, apparently.

He says no, and thanks, and she says thanks too, for scaring the burglars away. Then she says do you need a blanket?

He says what?

She says you're shivering.

And he is. Which is ridiculous. He hasn't been cold since he was ten years old.

-

q you ok

shits fucked you ok

hey

hey

dont be a dick q tell me ur ok

-

k you ok

hoa is losing their shit

k

come on

k please

aok bb trying to find q

what

ainceh whenr u talkign to q

k whats happpening

-

you alive

Of course! I think something crazy happened though o_O

is skeppy alive

Skeppy's fine!

cool. so is eryn

Thank goodness. Are you alright?
Pandas?

-

"There's nothing for you to do here," George says, when Sapnap drags himself to HOA headquarters. *Technopathy*. The egghead power for losers. His head could crack open and nothing but trains and cellphones and coffeemakers and washing machines and electric toothbrushes and Karl's novelty waffle maker and the entire city of Essempi would spill out. "You're not smart enough to figure out who did this, and you're terrible with the press. Go do your job. Don't get in the way."

Sapnap doesn't take it to heart because George is always a dick, and there's comfort in consistency. His goggles are pushed up into his hair and he looks manic, like he pounded a Redbull and six espresso shots and also a line of coke, when really his powers just aren't making him drowsy anymore.

So Sapnap does his job.

-

"Where are your flames, Wildfire?" says one over-confident robber. Sapnap can sympathize with folks on hard times—the HOA barely scrapes enough donations to pay its heroes minimum wage. But menacing the owners of a general store and enjoying it just makes you an asshole. "Can't catch a spark?"

I still have the power to kick your ass, Sapnap thinks, and then doesn't say because even in his head it sounds stupid. God he hates banter. He grabs an electric kettle off the nearest shelf and beans it at the guy's head.

-

It's the third purse-snatching of the day and some old guy is having a heart attack. Shit. Balls. Civilians are supposed to get better after being rescued, not worse.

"He has a pacemaker," says the old guy's wife, fluttering behind them.

Sapnap lowers the man to the floor, cradling his delicate old man skull. "Isn't that supposed

to keep things like this from happening?"

"Oh yes, why don't you tell the pacemaker it's doing its job wrong? I'm sure that will help!"

That's—huh. Shit, maybe he could just.

He lays his palm flat on the guy's scratchy red sweater and hisses, "*Get your shit together,*" and the pacemaker just—does.

The man's breathing steadies. The woman whispers, "What did you do?"

Sapnap doesn't know how to answer that.

-

Antfrost is a small-time villain. Cat burglar by trade, emphasis on the cat. His whole MO avoids civilian involvement, which Sapnap respects.

Right now he's standing on the hood of a Corvette, cackling like a maniac and shooting fire from both hands.

"Hey!" Sapnap bellows, running upstream of screaming civilians and burning cars. "Give me back my powers, dick!"

Ant spins around. His grin is feral.

"If it isn't Wildfire himself. Gotta hand it to you, man, this power of yours packs a punch." He curls his hands into fists and Sapnap watches them ignite with tooth-edged jealousy. "Well. This power of *mine*, now."

A thin jet of flame shoots white-hot from the finger gun at Ant's hip, and Sapnap is forced to dive behind a jeep to avoid having his face melted off. Prick.

"You know, Wildfire," Ant says, in the conversational tone of a villain high on hubris, "I was a little worried when all this started. It wasn't supposed to swap powers, you know? And it definitely wasn't supposed to affect *us*."

Wait. What?

"But after a few days to *test drive*, I can say I'm pretty satisfied with the results!"

The jeep spontaneously combusts behind him. God Sapnap misses being able to do that.

Hold on. Test drive. Because they're in a car lot. Oh, *fuck this*.

Ant raises his hand and Sapnap just kind of. Scoots the car he's standing on. Ant tumbles off the hood, and when he springs to his feet, Sapnap nudges the bumper into his side. Like *barely*, even, but he goes sprawling six feet. While Ant yowls in pain Sapnap pens him in with three nearby cars.

"You broke my arm!"

Sapnap sits heavily on the roof of a Prius. "I barely touched you, you big baby."

Ant looks about three seconds from trying to barbecue him again, so Sapnap nods at the muscle car on the left, affixed with big overcompensating exhaust pipes. Flames spit out and Ant shouts in alarm. Doesn't seem like he knows that Sapnap used to be fireproof.

"What do you know about the swap?" Sapnap demands.

Ant seethes. "You poor bastard. You have no idea, do you?"

"Wow, it's almost like I'm interrogating you for information. Answer the question, asshole."

The cut of Ant's mouth is malicious. In the light of the fire his eyes glow red. "You know, I don't think I will. I think I want you to figure this out on your own. I hope it hurts like a bitch."

He thrusts out his hand and the world goes up in flames.

-

antfrost knows something about the swap

the cat burglar?

yeah

asshole got my powers and burned my arms

hahahaha you're pathetic

fuck offffff
ok what now

wdym

wdym wdym
whats the plan

idk ask dream

dream is dealing w press the govt and a shitton of ghosts
im asking you don't be a bitch

you're so annoying
it sounds like a lead go follow it I guess

god do you know ANYTHING

yes
eggpire is suspect #1

ive heard of them
worst name in the game
ok what else

why do you think people report to me i literally do not care

GEOREG

stop crying and watch me juggle this suv

-

The apartment hums with dormant machinery. Sapnap can map everything out with his eyes closed: the fridge and the microwave and the oven, the laptop on the coffee table, the space heater Karl left plugged in the last time he was home, the nervous system of lights, Quackity's electric blanket that he never took back. No Karl.

It's not his first time home since the swap. It's not Karl's either, but they keep missing each other. With just the two of them the place is too big. With him alone it's cavernous.

He falls face first on the couch. Shuts his eyes. Thinks of Quackity.

The next time he checks his phone, a message that he never typed is waiting to be sent.

miss you

He blinks. Out the message goes.

A siren goes by. Then another.

Sapnap jams a hat over his hair, ties his mask back on. Might as well log some overtime.

-

check-in. you alive

yeah
i think i'm getting the hang of dad's powers
i'm gonna try shadowstepping

cool just dont try shadowstedjisoaf;FUCKIGN

come onnn whats the worst that could happen

YOU COULD FALLINTO YUORS HADOW????

couldn't be me

imp if i have to quit giving bad the cold shoulder because his second favorite kid yeeted himself into the SHADOW REALM i swear to GOD

you should talk to dad anyway

IMP

ugh FINE
you're so boring
you really should talk to dad though this is embarrassing

i miss being an only child

-

Sapnap's phone vibrates while two gangs are trying to rob the same bank. It's Bad.

Look, it's not that Sapnap likes fighting with his dad. He really fucking hates it, actually. Once he was ten years old, new to himself and his powers, lighting fire to anything that got too close. Bad, a minor vigilante with powers of his own, was the only one willing to take a chance on him. That Bad was warm, dorky, mischievous. The Bad calling him now is resentful and power-hungry and indifferent to collateral damage. They both bake. They both love him and Eryn. Sapnap doesn't know when one became the other.

He should talk to him. He knows that. But there are more important things than his family drama, like flipping a switch in his head to activate the bank's security system and trap a bunch of idiots screeching *dibs* behind six-inch steel doors.

He's sitting on the sidewalk with traumatized bank tellers when Bad calls again. He sends it to voicemail.

-

Sapnap shambles into the apartment at the same time that Karl climbs through the window, covered in blood. His smile is a sliver of moon.

"Sapnap," he says, light as air. "Sapnap, Sapnap—"

Sapnap can't squeeze a word past the horror in his lungs. He lurches over the back of the couch but Karl is already on top of him, toppling him into the cushions, lips all over his face.

"*IloveyouIloveyou*, do you know that I love you? I missed you so much, I'm—"

"Covered in blood," Sapnap chokes.

"—covered in blood." Karl laughs like they're in on the same joke. When it becomes evident they're not, he stops.

"Oh, it's not mine! My tank's all full, dude. But that's a perfect segue, look, look at this."

For one paralyzing second, Sapnap sees nothing but red. Then there's a crimson globe spinning like a basketball over Karl's finger.

"Holy shit," Sapnap breathes. "Technoblade's blood manipulation?"

Karl preens. "*My* blood manipulation. Possession is nine-tenths of the law. Now quit squirming and let me look at you."

He flicks the blood to the floor and braces his hands on either side of Sapnap's jaw.

"Oh. Look at you. You're so beautiful." His breath tumbles out of him. "I've missed your face."

And he sounds like it. He sounds like he hasn't seen Sapnap in years and years.

-

Karl's been having a grand time with his powers, turns out. This is probably because Karl got the second coolest power in the business while Sapnap became a walking smarthome.

Karl coos sweetly. "Giving yourself a lot of credit there, Sap. Smart home?"

Sapnap grinds his forehead into Karl's collarbone in retaliation. It's so good to touch him. Karl's fingers slide into his hair and he sighs.

"I can't wait for this stupid swap to be over," he says. "Sooner rather than later."

Karl hums. "Sooner, later, never, who's to say."

"I mean." Sapnap blinks. "The HOA is saying it. And I'm saying it. And common sense is saying it. We've gotta switch back."

"Have to, got to, HOA. Language like that makes a man want to vigilante all over the place."

He can't be serious. Sapnap sits up to look at him properly. "Karl, I get that you're having fun, but this swap is a bad thing. Full stop. People are getting hurt. You get that, right?"

Karl's smile twitches. Tension threads into the easy tilt to his brow. "Look, agree to disagree. I don't want to fight, I want to snuggle with you."

"I don't want to fight either—"

"Great, then drop it."

"Apparently we can't, because you don't get it." All the shit Karl's been up to this past week, how does he not get it? "This swap has fucked the city. I've been putting out fires all week, I held a girl while she cried. Eryn could have fallen into his own shadow. And what, you don't care? You had a fun few days so screw everyone else?"

"They'll adapt. Just like you will."

Karl's eyes on him are unbearably cool. Hurt bruises his insides, and then pulls them taut like live wire.

"Jesus, Karl, would it kill you to be serious for once in your life?"

"Maybe I don't want to, okay?" Karl snaps. "Maybe I don't want to be serious and I don't want to talk about this and maybe I don't want my freaking power back, so can you just drop it already?"

Sapnap falls silent. Restless energy drives Karl to his feet, breathing hard until he's breathing slow. When he turns around his smile looks sickly, and Sapnap's heart nearly punches from his chest to get to him, to hold him, to catch that smile before it falls.

"Hey, hey." He crosses the divide in two strides, cradling Karl's face in his hands. Karl leans close and Sapnap leans closer, tips their foreheads together. "What's wrong? Talk to me, I'll listen. I'm listening, baby."

Karl tells him.

-

“I thought I had it handled,” Karl says. “I thought I could keep it from getting worse. And then the swap happened, and whoops! Turns out I forgot a whole person. *Our* person.”

They’re on the floor. Karl rolls a bead of blood across his knuckles. Sapnap opens his mouth and nothing comes out.

Karl whistles through his teeth. “Yeah. Sorry about the whole. Completely ruining our relationship with the love of our life thing. My bad.”

“Karl,” Sapnap says, and Karl jumps. His mouth is tight, and so are his fingers, bloody, hooked in Sapnap’s clavicle like he might run if he lets go.

Sapnap says, “I’m sorry. That’s shit, to go through alone. I’m so sorry.”
Karl laughs, a wet and bubbly thing. He sniffles. He laughs again. “Yeah. It’s shit. Yeah.”

They tuck into each other. Sapnap rocks them a little.

“I can’t forget Quackity again,” Karl whispers. “I can’t.”

And how can Sapnap blame him for that?

-

It’s another red-eye shift. Sapnap is on a rooftop, changing traffic lights for an ambulance.

There’s a silhouette on the next roof. He knows that shadow better than his own.

He shouts, like an idiot, and the shadow bolts.

“Facade!” He scrambles after him. “Stop!”

Facade doesn’t stop. Facade jumps to the next roof, and then the next. He seems to glide through the air, gazelle-like. Even in the dark Sapnap can see the wings on his shoes, half a roof ahead of him. Dawn-cold air spikes in his lungs. They’re coming on an intersection, too wide to vault.

Facade isn’t slowing. Sapnap’s stomach drops.

“Don’t—”

He does, and Sapnap’s scream seizes in his chest as he keels off the roof to catch him. He grabs Facade’s ankle while the lip of the roof bruises his thighs, barely stopping him from going over.

He does, and Sapnap’s scream seizes in his chest as he keels off the roof to catch him. He grabs Facade’s ankle while the lip of the roof bruises his thighs, barely stopping him from going over.

And Facade is just—standing there. Neither flying nor falling, leashed to the roof by Sapnap’s stretching arm, what the *dick*.

“Wait,” he wheezes, barely audible over his thundering heart, “Facade, wait—”

“Let go, Wildfire.”

“Facade—fucking, *please*—”

“I said, let *go.*”

Pressure bears down on Sapnap so fast and so hard that he hears his knees crack against the roof. His spine compresses. His ears pop. The weight vanishes but he still can’t *breathe*. He tries and he tries and static rises up inside him until he’s underwater, the city a dull conch shell roar.

A voice above him. Winged shoes swimming into view.

Wildfire, Facade says. And then Quackity says, Sapnap?

Sapnap wants to answer him. He thinks if he tried he’d throw up on those nice shoes.

Quackity tells him he’s okay. Quackity tells him to breathe.

Breathe. In like this. Out like this. Slower.

The static recedes.

“Shit,” Sapnap coughs. “Fuck.”

“Shit fuck is right,” Quackity agrees. “What the hell was that?”

“Technopathy. City gets—loud, sometimes.”

Quackity’s weight shifts. Hands, then, firm and fitting the grooves of Sapnap’s ribs. Heaving up.

“It’s cold as balls out here. Come on.”

He steps off the roof, and Sapnap follows.

-

The casino penthouse is the crossroads between supervillain lair and CEO corner office. The lights come on with a snap of fingers, which is such a dramatic, show-offy, Quackity detail that Sapnap’s heart flutters at the edges.

It’s strained at first, and then it’s easy, like running rust from a faucet. They talk about their week, about their powers, about Eryn and Aegis and Slime. The chaos and confusion and the poor powerless plebs suffering for it all. Antfrost’s lead going cold. Karl comes up—Quackity pivots. Bad comes up—Sapnap nearly bites his tongue changing the subject. Quackity gives him a shrewd look but lets it go.

“So you miss punching things?” he asks. He’s grinning, knife-sharp and lovely.

“Dude, you have no idea how much I miss punching things.”

“Didn’t Warden have these fuck-off big mechanical arms? You could punch things with those.”

“They’re at HOA headquarters,” Sapnap says. “I’d have to fill out paperwork and shit to take them out.”

“*Or*,” says Quackity.

-

So they steal Warden’s arms.

It’s easy. Like embarrassingly easy. Sapnap is going to have to address their security flaws, for real.

They find a condemned building to test them out, chasing each other with barking laughter. The arms purr along Sapnap’s spine. Quackity shoots up through a collapsed ceiling and Sapnap follows, using one arm to grappling hook through the hole and coiling the other around Quackity’s waist, pulling him flush.

They stare at each other, wild-eyed and panting.

“Caught you,” Sapnap says.

“First time for everything, hero,” Quackity says, breathless, and Sapnap is struck by him all in a rush. He lifts his hands and waits for Quackity to push him away. He thinks they’re both surprised when he doesn’t.

Quackity’s face fits to his palms just like it used to. “I’m really glad you’re okay.”

For just a second, Quackity’s eyes go big and round and vulnerable. “Of course I’m okay,” he scoffs. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

“You could’ve told me that.”

Quackity steps back. Warden’s arm drops, and so do Sapnap’s hands. “What, do you want an apology? Did you really expect me to answer the guy who’s been trying to arrest me for months, when I’m scrambling with a new power just like every other schmuck in this city?”

What else can he say? “Yeah, I did.”

“Well, that’s on you. You’re a hero, idiot. I’m a villain. Do the math.”

Sapnap balks. “What does that matter?”

“You beautiful dumb bag of rocks, that’s all that matters,” Quackity explodes. “I’m a villain. I’m fucking *mean*. I barely talk to you and I cause problems with your fiancé. The only things I had going for me were my powers and my impeccable style and now I’ve only got one of those things. I’m mediocre with this gravity bullshit. And—and you’re a hero, you have the HOA, and your adoring public, and Karl, so you tell me, Wildfire, why the fuck would you—”

He stops like he’d skid over a cliff if he didn’t.

They breathe together. In like this, out like this. Slow.

Sapnap takes his hands.

"I want you," he says, "Exactly as you are. I'll love you until the fucking sun burns out."

Quackity stares at him. His cheeks are pinker than the watery dawn dripping across the sky.

"You know what you are?" he says, finally. "You're goddamn embarrassing. You're whipped. You're a simp."

"Yeah," says Sapnap.

Quackity bites down on a smile. Sapnap wants, suddenly, to kiss him.

"Talk to Karl," he says.

Something ripples across Quackity's face. "Not likely."

"It's not what you think, Q."

"Yeah? Because what I *think* is that Karl decided I was some evil mastermind and dropped me like a bad habit."

"Let him explain. One chance, that's all I'm asking."

"You're asking for a lot more than that."

But Quackity regards him, for a long time.

"…Maybe," he says. "*If* you talk to Bad."

Sapnap's joy curdles at the edges. "What? Come on, that's not fair—"

"When have I ever played fair? You're a sadsack when you don't talk to him regularly. Get your shit together and call your dad, man."

Sapnap grimaces. "You don't know what he's like now. He's—he's not himself."

"That's why you have to talk to him." Quackity's face softens. "Those are my terms, Wildfire. Take them or leave them."

Sapnap's pride smarts. He aches with gratitude.

"Deal," he grumbles, and Quackity pulls him down to kiss the corner of his mouth, very quick.

-

Sapnap gets his shit together and calls his dad.

After two rings: "*Pandas!*"

"Hey, Bad." Sapnap massages the back of his neck. "Sorry, I know it's late."

"*Pish*," Bad says easily. "*I'm just glad you called. How was your day?*"

“Better than the past few. Just got off work. You and Skeppy been okay?”

“*Of course! Your brother stopped by earlier and you’re calling now, I’d say we’re just peachy.”*

Sapnap snorts. Bad’s apartment is just up the block. “So, uh. I was thinking maybe we could. Talk, or something. Catch up.”

“Oh, I’d love that.” Bad’s voice is distracted. *“But Skeppy and I are baking a soufflé, and if we’re not vigilant it might collapse.”*

“Oh shit, and take all of society with it.”

“Language, smartypants.”

The warmth in his voice. Sapnap rolls his eyes to ward off any uncalled-for wetness. His gaze catches on the window of Bad’s apartment.

It’s dark.

Sapnap thinks—nothing. So the lights are off. So what? It doesn’t mean Bad is lying. It doesn’t.

He feels for the connection between their phones like prodding a loose tooth. Bad’s phone pings back at him, a locked box, and without thinking, Sapnap opens it.

Information floods his senses. Records. Locations. Messages. From him, Skeppy, Eryn, Ant—

Sapnap’s eyes slam open.

Bad is still speaking, but Sapnap can’t hear him. Static rises in his ears. He’s cold.

-

Bad’s phone pinged from a warehouse near the docks. Inside there are unswept floors and rats, barren shelves and rusted conveyor belts, and the low, relentless rumble of some great machine that should not exist.

-

The basement is a maze of rooms and storage. Latent power lines and a hibernating boiler, and the thunderous machine chewing at the fibrous cord of his spine. He tracks it to a room that’s gutted and cavernously black, poked through by two lights like pinholes. One red and one blue.

He steps forward, and Bad bursts from the dark at a run.

“Sapnap!” He’s in his work clothes, shadow drawn over his face like a mask. “What are you doing here? They’re coming!”

“What?” Warden’s arms lash the air. “Who?”

“The people responsible for this swap. Skeppy and I lured them here, but if they see HOA they’ll spook!” He drives Sapnap back by the shoulders. “Go, go now, before they get here!”

“Fuck that, I’m not leaving you—”

“You’re not enough alone! Go get backup, get Dream, we’ll stall them until you get back.”

“Bad—”

“There’s no time! Go!”

Dream. Dream will know what to do. He’ll call Dream, and Quackity and Karl, and Karl will rewind this mess—no, Karl’s powers were swapped—

Sapnap stops.

“Hurry!” Bad shoves at him. “Hurry, they’re coming—”

He catches Bad’s wrist. “You don’t have shadow manipulation anymore. Eryn does.”

Bad’s eyes are bright in the unnatural veil over his face.

“Why have you been talking to Antfrost? Where’s Eryn?”

Bad lifts his hands away. The urgency drops from his shoulders.
Sapnap spoke with Eryn today. He can’t remember the last thing he said to him.

If anything happens to that kid. *If anything happens to that kid—*

“Eryn is perfectly safe,” Bad says, hands held out, animal-soothing. “He stopped by earlier, like I said, then he went home. I only borrowed the shadow manipulation.”

Power mimicry. Thunder’s ability.

“What the hell’s that thing behind you?”

“Language—”

“Don’t. What is it?”

A moment of tension. The darkness lifts.

The full length of the room unfurls, broad and empty, no windows and no doors. Set in the center: two enormous glass pillars. A glowing blue gem suspended in one and a blood-red stone in the other, with enough power to dampen Sapnap’s nose with blood.

“I’ve wanted to tell you for the longest time,” Bad says. “But you’ve been so blinded by the HOA—”

“*Me?* I’m blinded?”

Red at the edges of his vision. That machine grinding down his spine.

“Ant said it wasn’t supposed to swap our powers.” He sucks in cold air. “What the fuck are you *doing*, Bad?”

Bad doesn’t hesitate. “It was supposed to erase them.”

Warden's arms go slack with shock. "What?"

"Think of it like this, Pandas—"

"Don't call me that."

Bad's eyes go soft and sad. Like the time Sapnap yelled at Eryn for taking his bandana without permission. Like the time Skeppy came home later than he promised and Sapnap pretended to be asleep instead of saying goodnight. Like the only time he told Bad he hated him, thirteen and so fucking stupid, over a fight he doesn't even remember. Bad got so quiet and so small. All the shadows in the house couldn't hide the hurt in his face.

That's how Bad looks right now, and Sapnap's heart aches with guilt, a pavlovian response. As though he's the one who did the betraying. As though Bad has the *right*.

"Okay, Wildfire," Bad says. "Think of it like this. One country develops nuclear weapons. Then a second, then a third. Before we know it we're relying on mutually assured destruction to prevent nuclear war." He's taken on his schoolteacher tone. "That's Essempi right now. Wouldn't it be better, safer, if all the bombs just disappeared? That's all that Skeppy and I and a few like-minded people were trying to do."

"Yeah?" Sapnap says. "You and your *like-minded people*, you would have lost your powers too?"

Bad shifts. "During the transition period, there would have been a dangerous vacuum, a need for order—"

"Stop," Sapnap says. "Do you hear yourself? This isn't vigilantism. This isn't even villainy. This is just…*bad.* You're not being the person I know you are. You're not—" His voice gutters. "You're not being my dad."

For just a moment, Bad looks stricken.

"You think I'm not your father?" Dark bleeds into his voice. "Fine. I won't be your father."

Sapnap falls through his shadow.

A weightless moment of terror throttles the scream from his throat. He comes to a gallows-sharp stop as Warden's arm spears up to grab an exposed pipe in the ceiling. He almost—*Bad* almost—

He propels back up, catching Bad in the chest with his boots. The other arm shoots out to pin him to the wall.

"Stand the fuck down," Sapnap snarls. Hovering above the smoky blackness, he twists to face the machine. There's no way he can figure out how it works. But if he can just brute through, neutralize the threat, then maybe with Warden's help he can fix it later. Reverse-engineer what went wrong. Set everything right.

He bulls his way in. The machine roars against him. Blood drips down the back of his throat, over his lips. Static. He pushes harder, feels it give—

Something pushes back.

Power mimicry. Bad, teeth bared, eyes vicious. He's fortifying the machine against him.

The purr of Warden's arms becomes a hiss, turning on him, and alarm knifes up Sapnap's spine. Bad wrests control of the arm pinning him down, vicing it around the pipe and shaking like a dog shakes a fox.

"Bad." Sapnap's ankles vanish into shadow. "Bad!"

But Bad's face is a stranger's.

All at once, rage scorches Sapnap's insides to tar. This man wearing his father's face.

It happens so fast. The boiler rumbling to life, the insectoid click of an ignition—and then the world is light and pressure and heat.

Sapnap is blown back, head cracking against bare concrete. The ground is ground again. The machine is slag. Sapnap chokes on gas and cooking flesh.

Bad is screaming.

"Bad." He crawls to his knees. "*Dad—!*"

He propels back up, catching Bad in the chest with his boots. The other arm shoots out to pin him to the wall.

"Stand the fuck down," he snarls, and a wave of nauseous déjà vu washes over him.

He's done this before.

Skeppy tears into the room. He rushes to Bad's side, whispers to him, touches his face. He doesn't look at Sapnap once.

"Skeppy, you—you have Rewind's power?" His voice falters. "No. It'll hurt you, Rewind told me, you can't—"

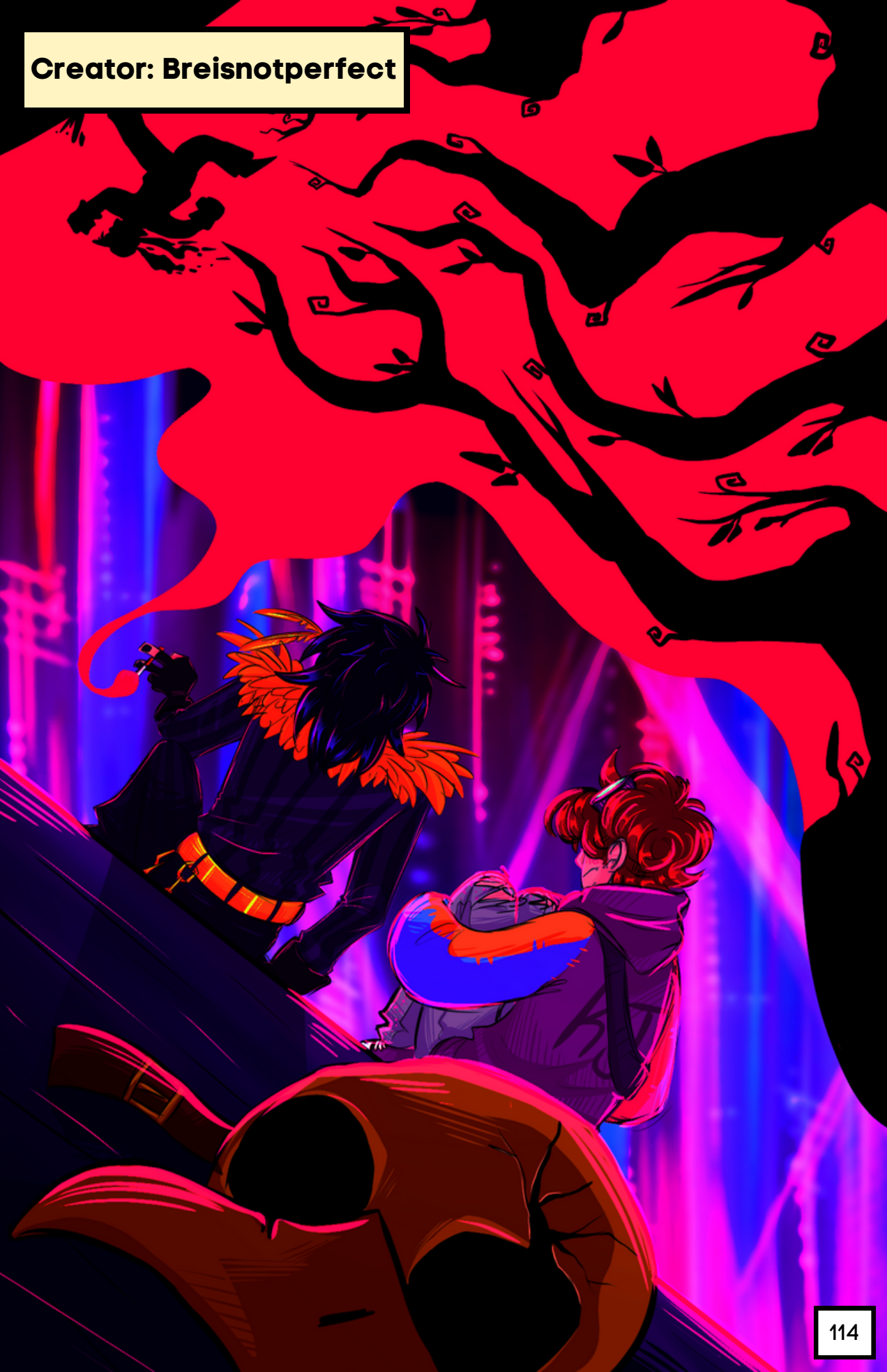
He cries out as Bad wrests control of one of Warden's arms. It vices onto the pipe, shaking like a dog shakes a fox.

The pipe tears free. The arm under Sapnap's control slides off the end, and with a sick jag of fear he realizes the only thing holding him up is the arm in Bad's control. If he dies here, Karl and Quackity will never forgive him.

"I will retrieve you," Bad bites, "once you've had time to reflect. Maybe then we can have a mature conversation as father and son."

In the moment before Sapnap falls, static rises in his ears. Oceanic. Drowning. A thought—*SWAP WAREHOUSE DOCKS EGGPIRE*—swept away in the current. He shuts his eyes. Out the message goes.

And then there is dark, and nothing but dark.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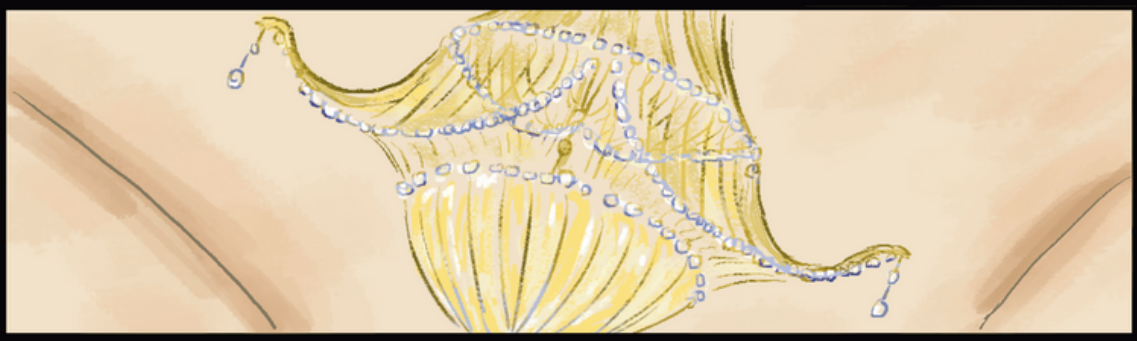
Creators: Yen Yinlin & A.D.



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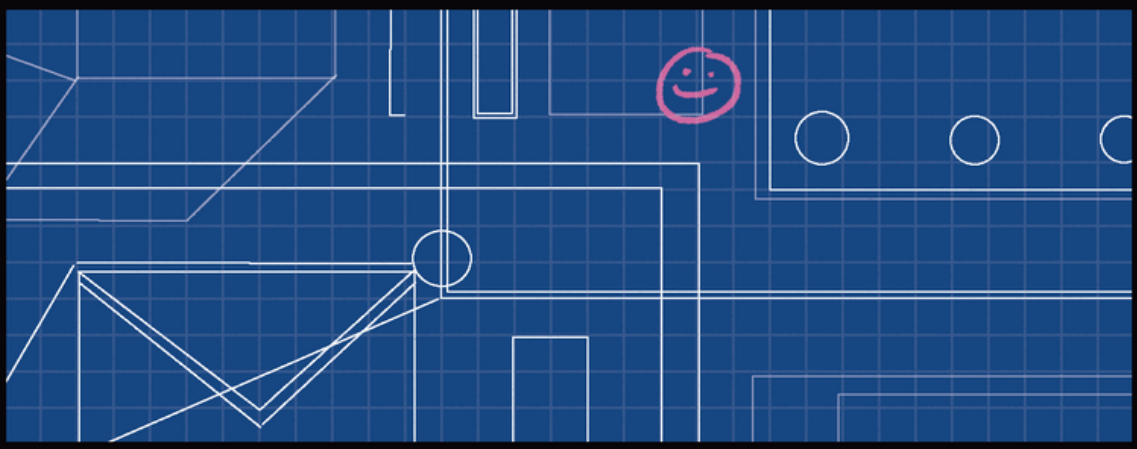
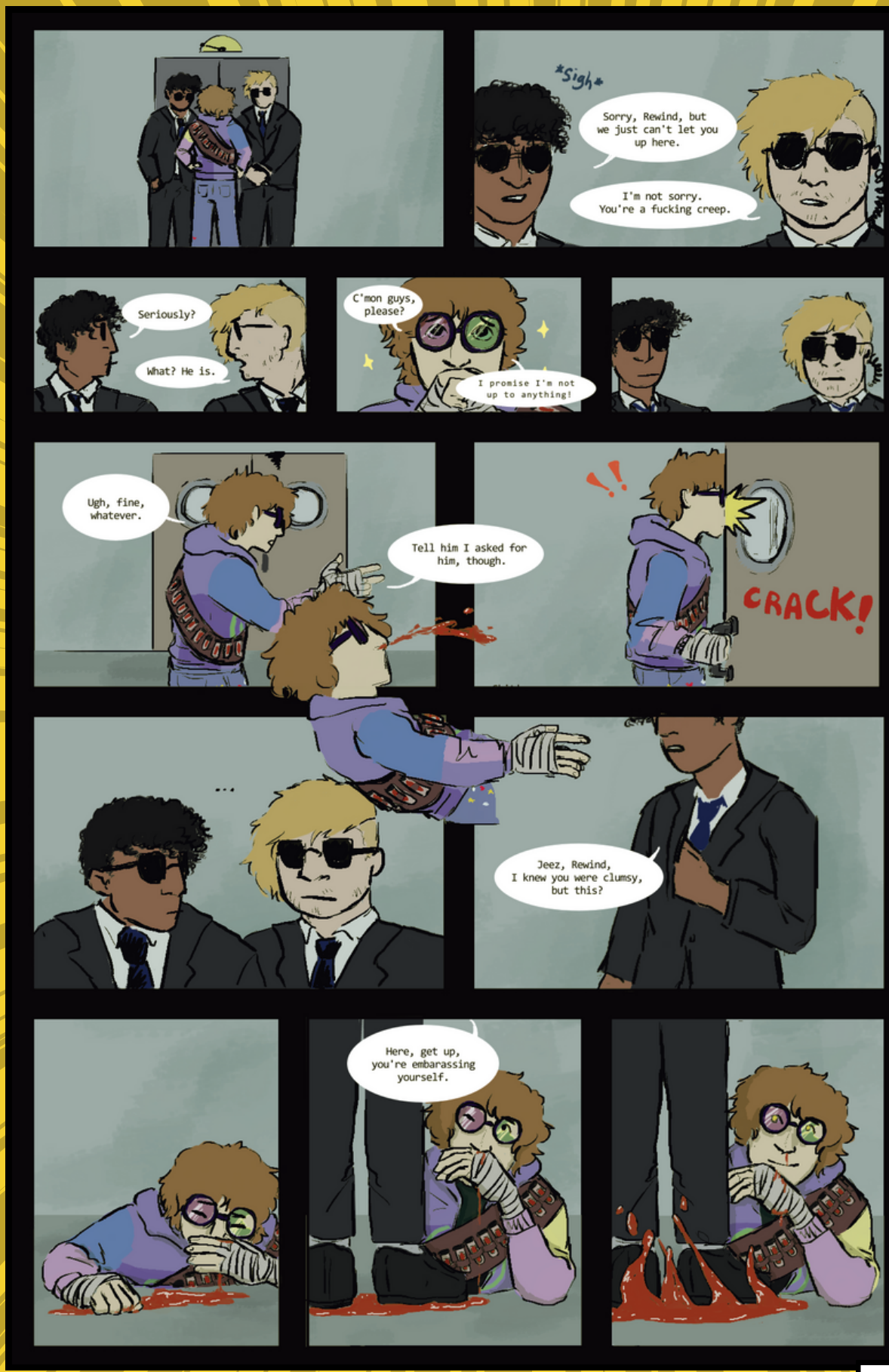


STAFF ONLY


Sigh
Sorry, Rewind, but we just can't let you up here.
I'm not sorry. You're a fucking creep.
Seriously?
What? He is.
C'mon guys, please?
I promise I'm not up to anything!
Ugh, fine, whatever.
Tell him I asked for him, though.
CRACK!
...
Jeez, Rewind, I knew you were clumsy, but this?
Here, get up, you're embarassing yourself.

fwoosh!
What the fuck? What is this?
Yeah, sorry about this.
But I really gotta see Quackity.
It's nothing personal.
Now if you'll just hold still-
Hold it!
WHAM!
CRASH!
ding!
1
2
3
pant..
pant..
Oh my god, what the fuck..
Oh.. ouch..
slurp!

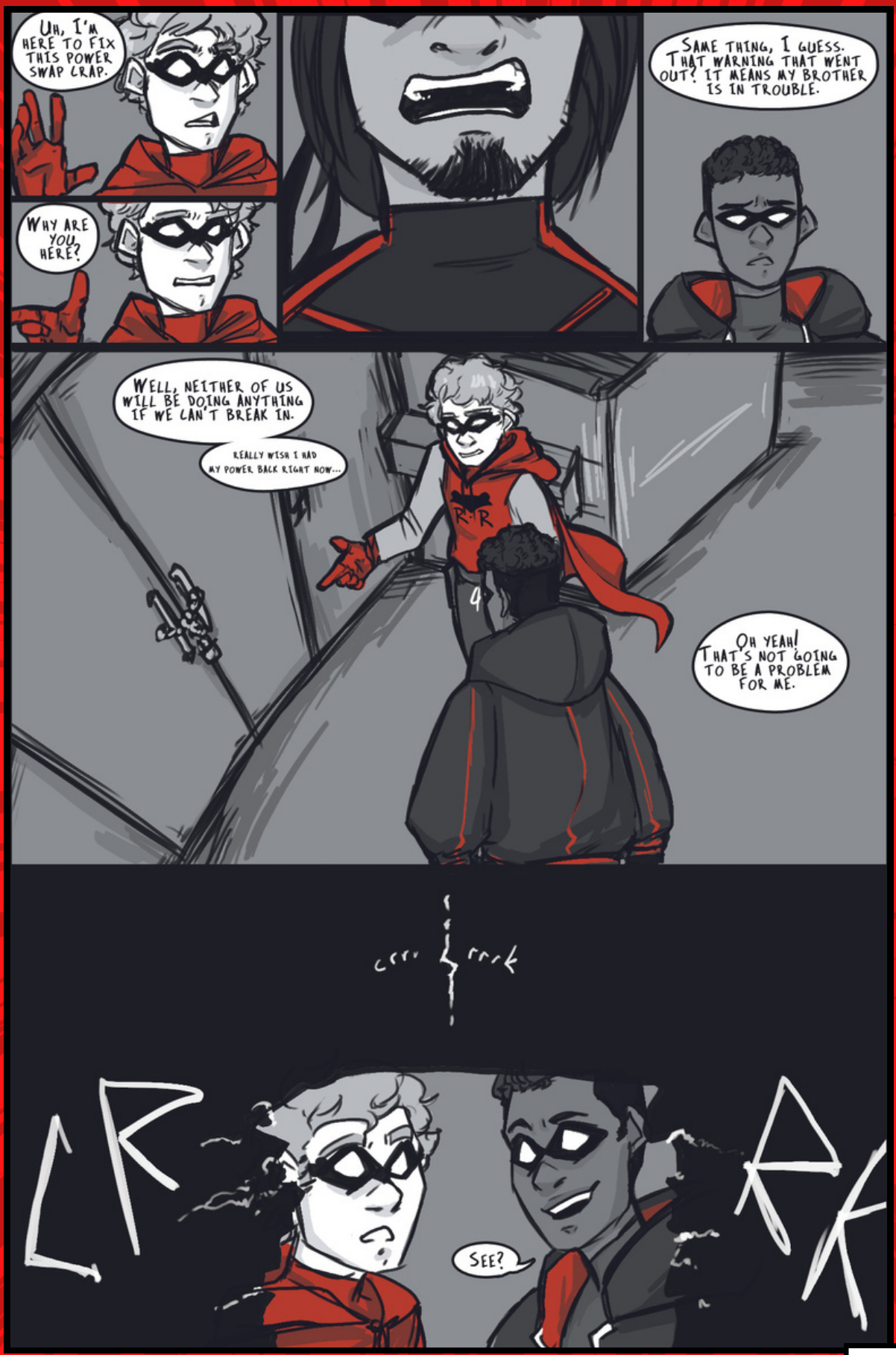
MEANWHILE, UPSTAIRS..
..but if I go in from that direction, I'm a sitting duck.
What the fuck?
What is wrong with me?
I'm making puns, oh god I'm making puns!
Right, well. Whatever.
I'm fucking losing it!
DING!
Who is it?
Hey! You can't!-
I'm sorry, did you have an appointment? Cause I'm really busy-

Rewind. What are you doing here?
..Hey, Q.
Don't call me that.
You don't want to see me! And that's fine! Really!
But I need your help. Sapnap was taken, and I can't..
You need my help.
Yeah. I'm not.. The heroes really aren't a fan of me, and I don't know if I can break into someplace like this myself.
And you're.. you're Quackity, and- and last I checked- you're also with Sap, so.. yeah.
I know you don't wanna work with me or even see me, but- but you know as well as I do that you're gonna break him out, and I'm gonna try and break him out, so..
You might as well do it with me.
Fine.

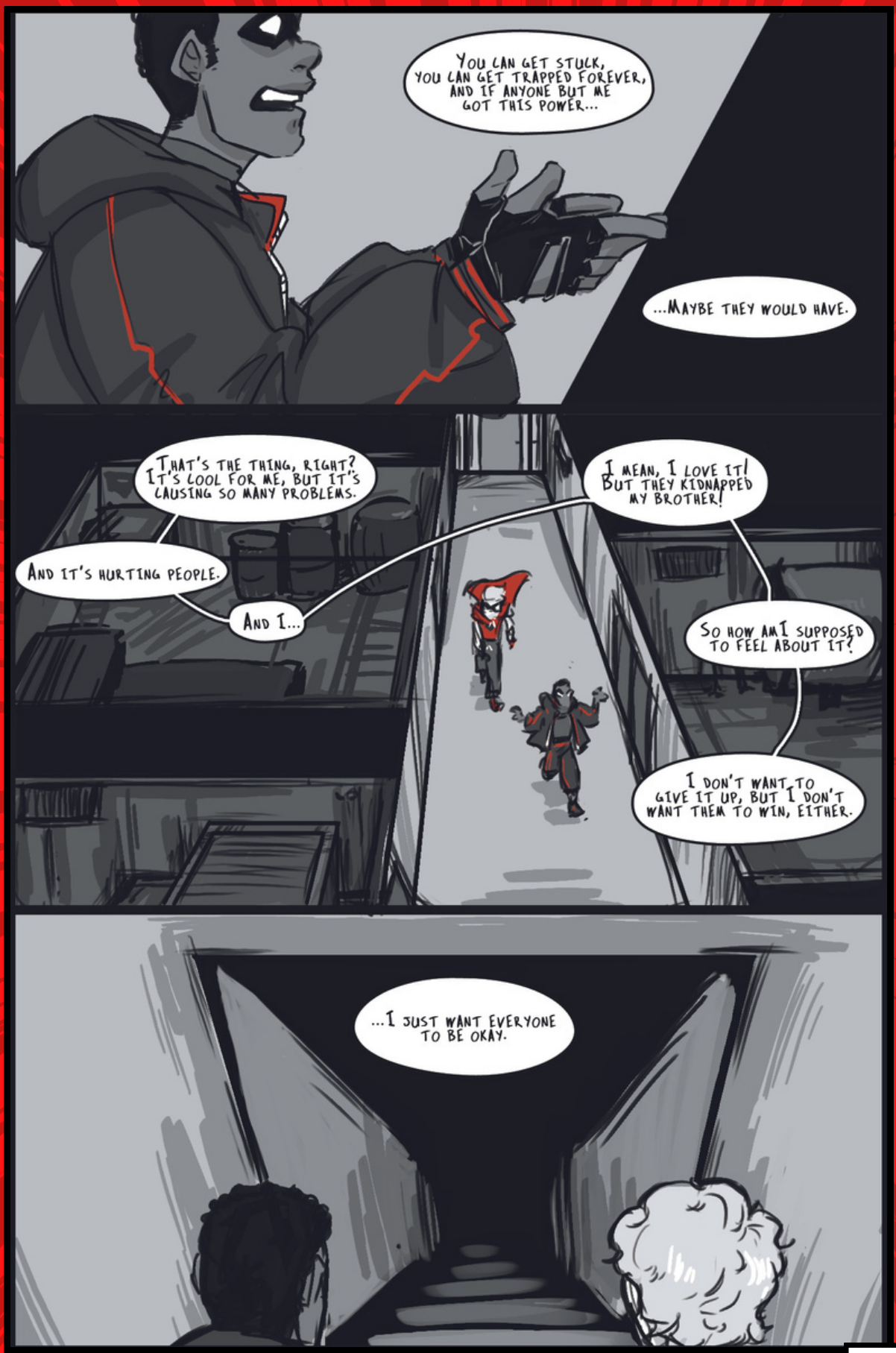
Creator: Okkariko

Creator: TD

EVERYTHING IS ALL MIXED UP NOW.
WHATEVER THAT THING IS? WHATEVER SCREWED UP EVERYONE'S POWERS? THAT NEEDS TO BE STOPPED.
LUCKY FOR ME, I ALREADY KNOW HOW TO USE THESE...
IT'S JUST A MATTER OF GETTING IN AND FINDING SAPNAP FIRST.
BUT AFTER...
THM
PH
YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE HERE!!!


UH, I'M HERE TO FIX THIS POWER SWAP CRAP.
WHY ARE YOU HERE?
SAME THING, I GUESS. THAT WARNING THAT WENT OUT? IT MEANS MY BROTHER IS IN TROUBLE.
WELL, NEITHER OF US WILL BE DOING ANYTHING IF WE CAN'T BREAK IN.
REALLY WISH I HAD MY POWER BACK RIGHT NOW...
OH YEAH! THAT'S NOT GOING TO BE A PROBLEM FOR ME.
crrr
rrrk
CRACK
SEE?

WHAT ABOUT YOU? LIKING THE NEW POWERS?
UH YEAH? OBVIOUSLY?
R·R
THIS IS WAY MORE USEFUL THAN JUST MAKING SWORDS AND STUFF!
LOOK!
R·R
HOLY-
WHY DIDN'T YOU DO THAT EARLIER?
BECAUSE IT'S DANGEROUS


You can get stuck, you can get trapped forever, and if anyone but me got this power...
...Maybe they would have.
That's the thing, right? It's cool for me, but it's causing so many problems.
I mean, I love it! But they kidnapped my brother!
And it's hurting people.
And I...
So how am I supposed to feel about it?
I don't want to give it up, but I don't want them to win, either.
...I just want everyone to be okay.

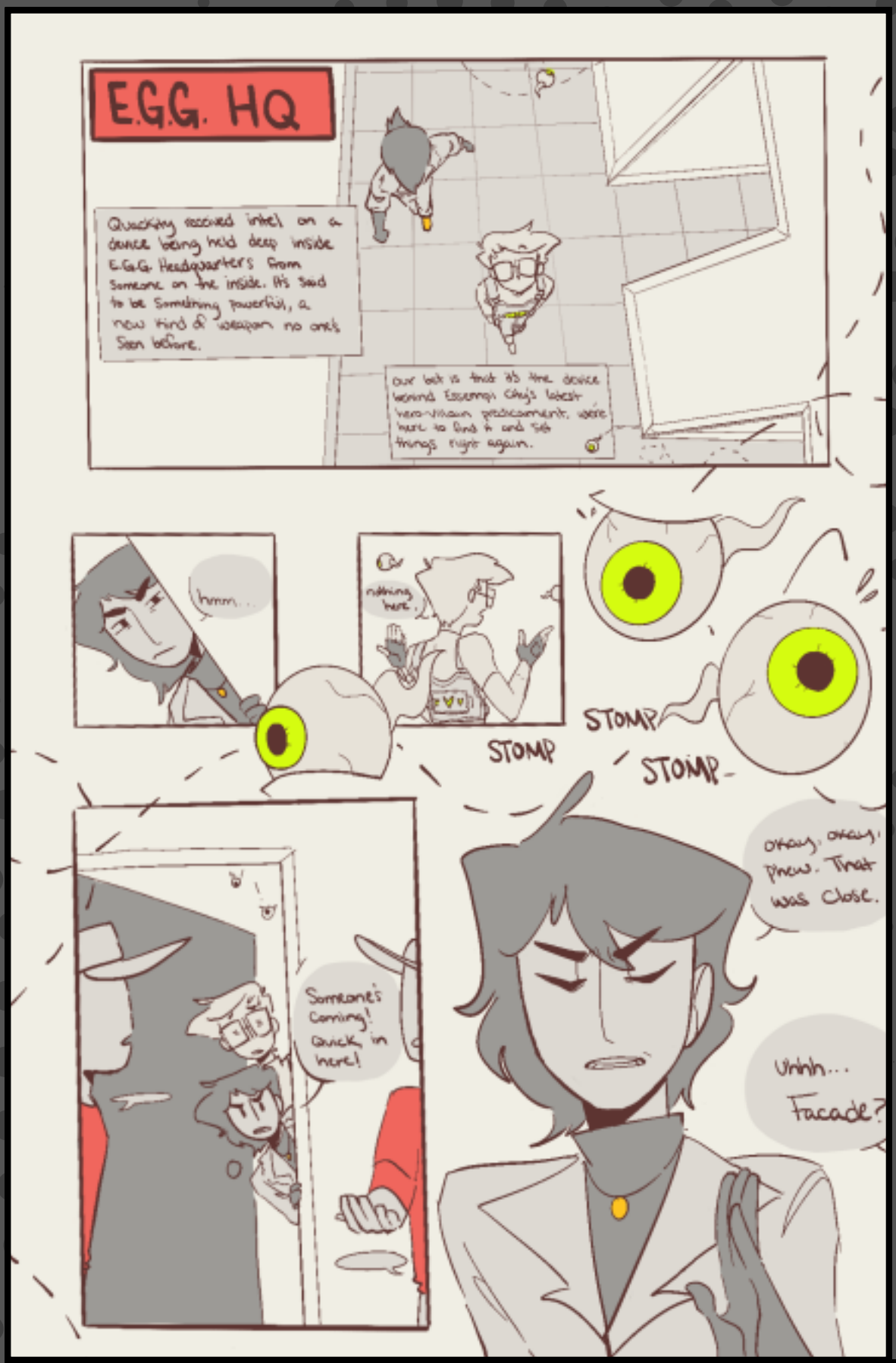
R·R
WELL, THE GOOD NEWS IS, I'M AMAZING AT MAKING CHOICES FOR OTHER PEOPLE
...WHETHER THEY WANT ME TO OR NOT.
OH YEAH? WHAT'S THE CHOICE YOU'RE MAKING?
SAME AS BEFORE.
YOU GO RESCUE YOUR BROTHER.
I GO STOP THE BAD GUYS.
BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT WE DO, RIGHT?
...RIGHT.
I'M A HERO.
THIS IS WHAT WE DO.

Creator: Sw4nfire

Creators: conkopodwii & definetelynotshouting

Hi! my name is charlie. Charlie Shmeckle.
In these parts, I'm a man of many talents and abilities— regarded by many as both friend and foe.
(gasp!)
Most, however, call me by another name:
THE
HANDYMAN
And today, I've been called to service by none other than one of the fiercest villains the world known has yet.
CREAAAAK
QUACKITY FROM LAS NEVADAS! A pleasure to meet with you again, Sir—
oh.

QUACKITY: AKA "FACADE"
you seem to be in quite the predicament.
Say anything about this and I kill you. Get the door and help me down, I'll fill you in.
one handy-hand
comin' up!
The run-down was a bit confusing, but I think I got it. Apparently, powers across Essentia City have been swapped left and right — hero or villain, no one was spared as a target, it seems.
Quackity hasn't been able to shapeshift all week, Foolish has been summoning force fields instead of lightning, and Fundy has swords instead of his animals... no one's even begun to think about what might have happened to purpled.
And I said-
But that's impossible!
My Power never changed!
Hm. You did just use it. Maybe you're an exception? or an anomaly? But why?
It doesn't matter, regardless. I know who's behind this, and I need your help to put it to an end. For good.


E.G.G. HQ
Quacking received intel on a device being held deep inside E.G.G. Headquarters from someone on the inside. It's said to be something powerful, a new kind of weapon no one's seen before.
Our best bet is to find it the device behind Escargo City's latest hero-villain predicament. We're here to find it and set things right again.
hmm...
nothing here
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
Someone's coming! Quick in here!
Okay, okay, phew. That was close.
Uhhh... Facade?

- VISION
- DENTAL
EGGPIR
bruh.
BREAK ROOM
you gents wouldn't happen to know the way out, would you?
GET THEM!

A SIMPLE 'NO' WOULDVE SUFFICED!!!
BREAK ROOM

move move move!
Where do we go!?!
Anywhere but here!
TOTALLY NOT A SECRET ROOM
Think that'll do!?
Come on!
FACADE!
BANG!

fwiping!
SLIME!
...huh?
did my powers change after all?
Thanks for the help guys, but un-
SLAM!
fwiping!
bye!
Facade! my powers did switch-
Slime.
I think we found it.

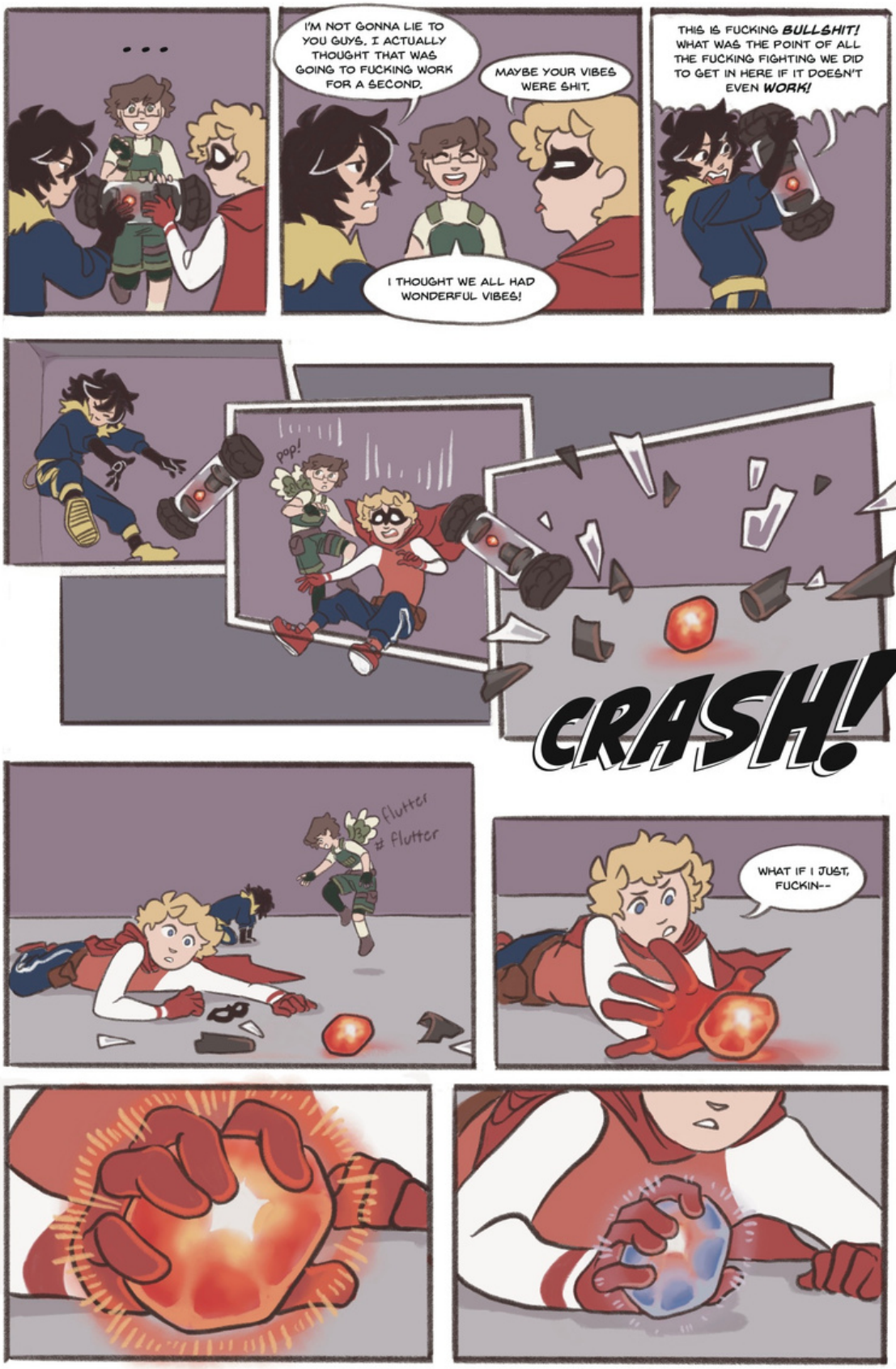
THE FINALE

WRITTEN BY GOGTOPIA
ILLUSTRATED BY COMFYMOTH

RED RACCOON
The most heroic vigilante in Essempi
(Depending on who you ask)
HEY
THUNK
THANKS GUYS!
GOTTA BE...
...AROUND HERE...
...SOMEWHERE
CAN YOU GIVE ME A HAND WITH THIS MYSTERIOUS DEVICE?
I DON'T KNOW HOW ANYMORE, FACADE FROM LAS NEVADAS
I THINK THIS NEW POWER ONLY WORKS WHEN I'M UNDER DURRESS

FACADE
Not as evil as he thinks he is
IT APPEARS THE POWER IS THE GEM INSIDE!
THERE'S SOME SORT OF FIELD AROUND IT THAT MY GRAVITY CAN'T BREAK. HOW DO I GET TO IT?
HANDY MAN
Now with legs attached!
BREAK THE CASING?
WAIT!
RED RACCOON?!
DO YOU HAVE ANY BETTER IDEAS?
DON'T DESTROY IT!
WE MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO FIX IT THEN, YOU STUPID BASTARD
WELL WE CLEARLY HAVE TO GET INSIDE THIS THING SOMEHOW!
MAYBE THERE'S A SAFER WAY TO OPEN IT?
SAYS WHO? YOU DON'T FUCKING KNOW HOW THIS STUPID DEVICE WORKS!
IF WE ALL CALMED DOWN, THEN MAYBE--
I THINK WE'RE ALL TRYING TO DO THE SAME--
YEAH? NOBODY FUCKING DOES, RACCOON!
REAL SMART TO DESTROY IT THEN!

IF YOU'RE SO FUCKING SMART, THEN YOU WORK IT
TWIST IT!
ALREADY TRIED IT
IF I CAN JUST... GET IT... UNSTUCK...
PULL IT!
PUSH IT
IT SEEMS THAT THIS MYSTERIOUS DEVICE IS TOO RIGID FOR THAT
UH...
OKAY, WELL THIS IS JUST FUCKING STUPID
WHAT IF WE ALL TOUCH IT AT THE SAME TIME?
WHAT ARE YOU EVEN TALKING ABOUT?
IF WE ALL WORK TOGETHER, MAYBE WE CAN SEND POSITIVE ENERGY INTO THE DEVICE!
NOT TO SHIT ON YOUR IDEA BIG MAN, BUT I'M NOT SURE HOW THAT WOULD HELP.
RED RACCOON, ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE WITH--
THE POWER
OF
FRIENDSHIP!


. . .
I'M NOT GONNA LIE TO YOU GUYS, I ACTUALLY THOUGHT THAT WAS GOING TO FUCKING WORK FOR A SECOND.
MAYBE YOUR VIBES WERE SHIT.
I THOUGHT WE ALL HAD WONDERFUL VIBES!
THIS IS FUCKING BULLSHIT! WHAT WAS THE POINT OF ALL THE FUCKING FIGHTING WE DID TO GET IN HERE IF IT DOESN'T EVEN WORK!
pop!
CRASH!
flutter
flutter
WHAT IF I JUST, FUCKIN--

DID WE DO IT?
I THINK...
...WE ACTUALLY..
...FUCKING DID!
DUDE, I COULDN'T HAVE FUCKING DONE IT WITHOUT YOU!
YEAH! I'M AWESOME!
UH, GUYS?
THIS NEW POWER IS QUITE INTERESTING!
THE DEVICE!

The End...?

Creator: Suwamoo

Mods

Ash

Head/Formatting

MasterAsh

masterash

Pidgedee

Social Media

pidgedee

Witchy

Discord

DarkWitchling

TJ

Editor

definitelynotshouting

definitelynotshouting

A Few E.G.G.s Short of the Full Scramble
Learn to Love this Kind of Atmosphere
Experimentation
Handyman #23 - In Goodish Hands
Desiderium

Guests

Comic Artist

BeckyBlah

beckyblah
beckyblah_art
beckyblah_art

Artist

breisnotperfect

breisnotperfect

Comic Artist

CONNOR

Nopedog_
cosmic-nopedog

Comic Artist

tembleque_cryptid

tembleque_cryptid
tembleque-cryptid

Guests

Artist

Kyri45

kyri45
kyri45
Kyri45

Comic Writer

thanotaphobia

thanotaphobia
thanotaphobia

Writer

greyquills

greyquills
greyquills

Betas

CorvidaeArts

CorvidaeArts
corvidaearts

Bad Blood
Static, Static, Static
Crisis of Faith
A Conyumdrum

calyxshi

calyxshi

The Finale
Confrontation
Purple's Day Off Vlog!
(Maps & Shara)

Eeveecat1248

eeveecat1248

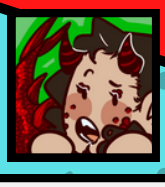
Eminence #10: New Routines
Down to Hell and Up To the Sky

Ren

zren1a
zrenia

Nemesis #15: The Tunnels
Wiskey, Neat
Measure of a Man

Artists



Hispancin

dewdropdraws

hispanicin

Sparks

Emberglowfox

IOWNFISH

iownedfish

iownfish

iown_fish

Mikastis

lululablette

Mikastis

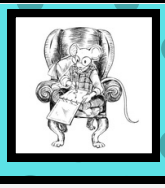
Flowchi
Elmflowers

elms-art-gallery

elmflowchi

Erzech

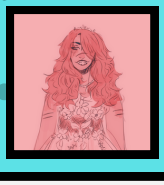
erzech0



Apatura Iris

iris_apatura

apatura-iris-atelier



Cherry

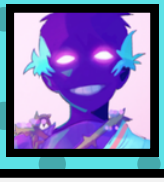
cherrycaffi

yyorkwest

yyorkwest

yyorkwest

yyorkwest

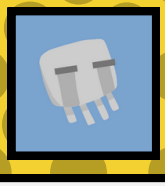


sw4nfire

sw4nfire

aswanIsOnFire

sw4nfire



ghastjpg

ghastjpg

ghastjpg

Suwamoo

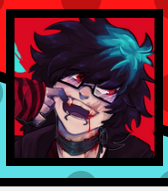
suwamoos

suwamoo

Comic Artists

destefaniart

destefaniart
destefaniart
destefaniart



Styx

strato_nimbuss
kumulo_nimbuss
southern--downpour

TheUntitledArtist

TheUntitledArtist
TheUntitledArtist
TheUntitledArt

Gynii

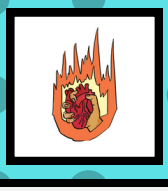
gynii
gyniizilla

Maps

ambsacen

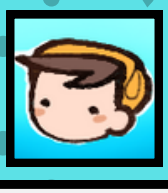
Eekonis

eekonis
eekonis



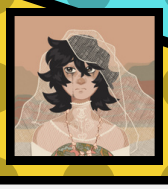
Yen Yinlin

honeyblockm
korethekiller



conkopodwii

conkopodwii



Comfymoth

comfymoth

TD

paradoxalriven

Writers

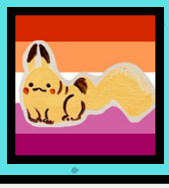
roseycheeked

rosycheeked

Odaigahara

droidofmay

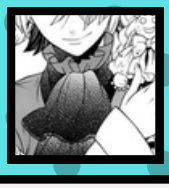
Odaigahara



bandanabiel

bandanabiel

bandanabiel



amaranthinecanicular

amaranthinecanicular

amaranthinecanicular

Comic Writers

Antimony_Medusa

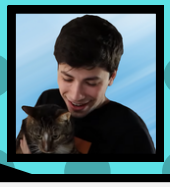
antimony_medusa

antimony-medusa

Shara

anarchy-and-piglins

a_piglins



Jules

gogtopia

404ity

karlnapity

Salt oftheEarth

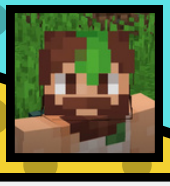
Salt-oftheearth

sa1t_oftheearth

zephrains

zephrains

zephrains



A.D.

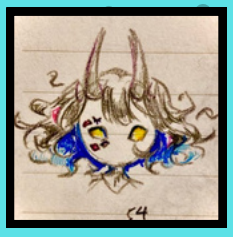
anonymous-dentist

Merch Artists

mykaeba

Coloring Book Artist

mykaeba



8.32

Emotes Artist

improvapocalyps
improvApocalyps

Inktea

Wallpaper Artist

ERO_RS
Inktea

Tommy Nguyen

Icon Artist

shrimpeii_2101